SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL

THE WALKING CITY

A CHRONICLE OF THE THIRTEEN CIVIC ORGANS OF MANHATTAN
TOLD IN THE VOICES OF ITS CITIZENS

PUBLISHED BY SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL / HYPOSTYLE PRESS
NO BLACK IS USED IN THIS VOLUME.

THE WALKING CITY

A Chronicle of the Thirteen Civic Organs of Manhattan, Told in the Voices of Its Citizens

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS
SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
NO BLACK IS USED IN THIS VOLUME.

THE WALKING CITY. A Chronicle of the Thirteen Civic Organs of Manhattan.

Surjan, with the aid of Claude.
Published by Surjan Super School / Hypostyle Press.

This is a work of joyful invention. The island is real; the buildings walk only here.

Set in EB Garamond and IBM Plex Mono. Printed, when

printed, on warm paper.
No black is used in this volume. The darkest value here is a deep warm brown, and it is still warm.

Companion to the atlas SUPER SUPERGRAPHICS: An Atlas of Walking Civic Organs.

First edition. Radical joy. Radical preservation. Return.

for everyone who ever leaned on a building
and felt it lean back

A building that lasts one day must be scheduled like a tide, not like a lease.

Scale is not size. Size is how loud a thing is willing to remember.

— FROM THE CATECHISM OF THE WALKING CITY

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

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A WORD BEFORE THE DOORS OPEN

FOREWORD

by Surjan

I have spent my life being told that a building must hold still. Stand there, they said. Be permanent. Pay rent to the ground for the right to remain. And for a long time I believed them, because the people who say such things are the people who own the ground, and it is hard to argue with a landlord while you are standing on their floor.

Then one summer, in the city I love most and understand least, the buildings stopped listening. Not the office towers, which had never listened to anyone, and not the banks, which listen only to money. It was the other buildings — the ones a city keeps for itself.

The archive. The lung. The bath. The school with no walls. The gate that frames the sky. Thirteen civic organs, swollen to the scale of the harbour, got up on their own accord and began to walk the shoreline of Manhattan, and the island, which has seen everything, had never seen this, and did the only sensible thing. It laughed.

This book is the record of that laughter. It is not my record. I was not there in the way the people in these pages were there — the harbour pilot who saw the first one move, the night baker who fed the Beacon at dawn, the twelve-year-old who danced under the Bell before the grown-ups could tell her not to. I only gathered their voices, the way you gather flowers that grew without you, and arranged them so that the summer could be read from beginning to end. The arranging is mine. The joy is entirely theirs.

A word about the joy, because I am asked about it more than anything else. People assume that joy is the easy feeling, the shallow one, the one you reach for

when you have nothing serious to say. They have it backwards. Joy is grief turned all the way inside out, until the lining shows, and the lining is bright. Every one of these walking organs is made of something the city lost — a pier that rotted, a market that closed, a family that was priced out of the block their grandmother built. The Flower Silos hold what the city was afraid to forget. The Pixel Archive files by colour every room somebody once loved. To make a building walk is to refuse to let the loss sit still, and refusing is the most joyful thing a person, or a building, can do.

You will notice that the buildings speak. They speak in the first person, and usually in the plural, because a civic thing is never one voice. When the Timber Wave says *we*, it means nine hundred glued ribs and every person who has ever taken shelter under it, all saying *we* together. I did not teach them to talk. I only stopped pretending they were mute. The genderqueer child learns early that the world will

assign you a shape and a silence, and that both can be refused; the buildings in this book learned the same lesson, and this whole volume is what refusal sounds like when it decides, at last, to sing.

The plates between these chapters are the buildings drawn as they wish to be seen — bright, flat, at the scale of the city, colour doing the work of a notification. There is no black in them, and there is no black in the words, and this is not a decoration. It is a promise. We do not do endings here. We do tides. Where you expect a full stop, look for a turn.

Now open the doors, all of them at once, and let the summer walk in.

HOW TO READ A CITY THAT MOVES

INTRODUCTION

by Surjan

There are three things you should know before the first building takes its step, and all three are true, which is the only reason I bother telling you.

The first is that the shoreline of Manhattan is not a place. It is a sentence. Read it from the Battery at the bottom to the ship canal at the top and you will find it is made of words — piers, coves, slips, marshes, the made land where the river was told to move over and, being a river, only partly agreed. The civic organs are the punctuation of that sentence. When they set down, they place a comma in the water; when they gather, they end a paragraph; and twice a day the

moon comes along and rearranges the whole thing, so that the island you read at dawn is not the island you read at dusk. This is why the buildings walk. Not because they are restless. Because they are in conversation, and a conversation that stands still is not a conversation, it is a plaque.

The second thing is that these buildings are analogue connectors, and I will need that phrase to survive the whole book, so let me set it down carefully here where you can find it later. A connector is any thing that makes two people meet who would otherwise have passed. A screen is a connector that lets you meet without arriving. An analogue connector will not let you off so easily. It demands your body, in one place, at one hour, close enough to smell the harbour, and it demands that you be able to see it from six blocks away, which is why it is painted at the scale of the sky. You cannot stream a block party. You cannot save a disco for later and attend it alone. The whole argument of the summer is that some joys

refuse to scale down to fit inside a hand, and thank the tide for that.

The third thing is the smallest and the most important. Nobody in this book chose the buildings, and nobody refused them. They arrived the way weather arrives, the way a good mood arrives, unearned and undeserved and exactly on time. A citizen would wake, and the harbour would be different, and the difference would be enormous and pink and yellow and moored off the end of their street, and the citizen would have to decide, before breakfast, whether to be afraid of joy or to go outside and stand in it. Most of them went outside. That decision, repeated ten thousand times along the shore, is the true architecture of this book. The buildings are only the excuse.

A note on the voices. I have kept the citizens' own words wherever I could, and where I could not, I have kept their own turns of phrase, because a person's grammar is their fingerprint and I would not smudge

it. When a building speaks, I have set its voice apart, indented and leaning, so you always know whether you are hearing a Manhattanite or a Manhattan thing. Sometimes it is hard to tell them apart. That is not a flaw in the printing. That is the point.

Read it slowly if you can. Read it at high water if you are able. And when you reach the end, which is not an ending, do the thing the island did on the first morning, the only correct response to a building learning to walk. Do not scream. Laugh, and then follow it down to the water.

PROLOGUE

The Island Clears Its Throat

in the voice of the shore itself

I am the edge where the made land meets the moving water, and I have been many things. I have been a marsh, and then a wharf, and then a highway, and then a promise nobody kept, and then a park where the promise was finally, partly, kept. I have been walked on by more feet than there are stars I can see through the light, which is not many stars, but is a great many feet. I have held up markets and prisons and gardens and the small brave businesses of the drowned. I thought I had held up everything. Then, one summer, I was asked to hold up buildings that

could hold themselves up, and could, if they chose, hold me.

They came the way good news comes, which is to say suddenly, and to the wrong address first. The harbour pilots saw them before the mayors did. The night workers met them before the newspapers named them. This is correct. A city belongs to whoever is awake in it, and at four in the morning the city belongs to bakers and nurses and the tide and me.

Let me tell you what it is like to feel a building decide to walk. First there is a stillness so complete you would swear the water had been told a secret. Then the great skirt of the thing lifts, just at the hem, the way you lift a coat to step over a puddle, except the puddle is the East River and the coat is four hundred feet of ribbed yellow gladness. Then it steps. And the step does not land like weight. It lands like a chord. Every plank of me hums with it, and the hum runs up through the soles of whoever is standing on me, and they feel, for one instant, exactly how I have felt for

four hundred years: *held up, and holding up, at the very same time.*

You will meet thirteen of them. Do not try to keep them straight at first. Let them blur, the way a crowd blurs before it becomes your friends. There is one shaped like six silos wearing flowers, and one shaped like a wave that forgot to fall, and one that is only a doorway, enormous, framing the sky so that the horizon becomes a painting you can walk through. There is a bell that decided to be a sound instead of a shape. There is an archive that files the whole city by colour instead of by date, so that everything anyone ever loved is shelved together under the same warm gold.

They talk to each other. I want to be clear about this before we begin, because it is the strangest and truest thing in the book. They talk, and I carry the talk. A word set down at Gansevoort at noon is answered off Inwood by dusk, and the answer travels through me, along my bulkheads and my rotting

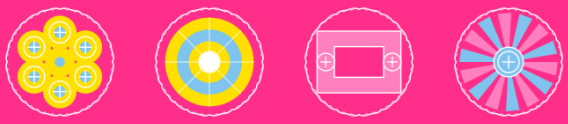
timber cribs and my new steel sheet-piling, the way gossip travels along a fence. I have been eavesdropping all summer. I have loved every word.

Here is the first word, and it is not a word at all. It is a foghorn, three long, from a pilot who has just seen something that the harbour has no signal for, and is improvising. Listen. The summer is clearing its throat.

I

THE MORNING THE FIRST ONE MOVED

On the day a building took a step, and the island did not scream but laughed



A
FLOWER SILOS

G
WHITE VAULT

J
YELLOW GATE

D
YELLOW TRUMPET

CHAPTER ONE

The Foghorn With No Signal

in the voice of Otto, harbour pilot

There is a signal for everything on the water. That is the first thing they teach you, and the last thing you believe, because eventually the water shows you something the book of signals never imagined, and then you are just a man with a horn and a heartbeat, making it up.

I had brought a container ship up through the Narrows and handed her off, and I was running the pilot boat back up the Hudson in that flat grey hour before the sun commits to anything. The city was doing its four-a.m. impression of a place that had

never hurt anyone. And off Gansevoort, where the old peninsula pokes its green thumb into the river, I saw a hill that had not been there the night before.

I want to be precise, because I have been asked to be precise by people who did not believe me, and precision is the revenge of the honest. It was not a boat. It was too tall for a boat and too soft for a barge and it was, I swear on my father's license, the colour of a school bus that had decided to become a flower. Six great fluted drums, ribbed like corduroy, and on the side of each drum an enormous pink blossom, and beneath the blossoms a skirt of the same pink where it met the water. It stood maybe forty stories. It was moored to nothing. And as I watched, it lifted its hem.

I have seen a lot of things lift on the water. Bridges lift. Fog lifts. Once, in a storm off the Hook, I saw a whole car ferry lift on a swell like a leaf on a breath. But I had never seen a building lift its own skirt to take a step, and so I did the only professional thing

available to a man whose training has run out. I sounded the horn. Three long. There is no signal for *a building is walking toward Chelsea*, so I used the signal for *I cannot maneuver*, which was, if you think about it, the truest thing I could have said.

And here is the part I did not tell the newspapers, because they wanted fear and I did not have any to give them. When the horn finished, the building answered. Not with a horn. With a kind of low hum that came up through the hull of the pilot boat and into the wheel and into my hands, a chord, warm as a hand on the back of your neck, and the chord had a shape to it, and the shape, God help me, was a question. It was asking me something. I have been on the water forty years and I have never once been asked a question by the water. I have been threatened, drowned nearly, becalmed, blessed. Never asked. And now this yellow flowering hill was asking me a question in a language I did not have, and I found that I was not afraid, I was flattered, the way you are

flattered when a stranger at a party turns out to have wanted to talk to *you*.

So I answered the only way I knew. I turned the pilot boat and I ran alongside it, matching its pace, which was slow, a walking pace, a strolling pace, the pace of someone who has all morning and intends to enjoy it. And we went up the river together, the flowering hill and the pilot boat, past the piers where the joggers were just starting, and one by one the joggers stopped, and did not run, and did not scream, and did the thing that I think saved us all that summer. They waved. A whole shoreline of ordinary people, out early for their own small reasons, looked up at a walking building and decided, without a meeting, without a vote, to be glad.

By the time we reached the old rail yards the sun had committed itself and the building was gold from crown to skirt and the pink flowers were on fire with light and there were maybe two hundred people on the esplanade waving at it and it was humming its

chord back at all of them, that same warm question, and I understood the question at last. It was not *what am I*. It was not *are you afraid*. The question the building was asking, of the pilot and the joggers and the whole waking island, was the simplest question there is, the one we are all too proud to ask out loud. It was asking: *will you come out and play.*

I radioed it in. I said, Harbour, be advised, there is a structure making way northbound, Hudson, hand steering, and the harbourmaster's clerk came back and said, Otto, say again the type of vessel, and I looked at the flowering hill walking up my river in the new gold light with two hundred people running along the shore to keep up with it, and I keyed the mic, and I said the only true thing.

I said: Harbour, be advised. It's not a vessel. It's a neighbour.

> THE FLOWER SILOS, FIRST OF THE THIRTEEN, SPEAK

We are the Silos, and we are the archive that blooms. Do not mistake the flowers for decoration. Each blossom is a door, and behind each door is a drum, and inside each drum is a year the city tried to throw away and we caught. We store what the city is afraid to forget.

We chose Gansevoort because the ground there is not ground. It is made land, timber cribs and river-stone, a place the city built by refusing to accept the shape of its own shore. We admire that refusal. We are made of the same. When we lifted our hem this morning it was not to leave. It was to arrive somewhere better, which is a thing you can only do by moving.

The pilot answered our question. Few do, on the first morning. He ran his little boat beside us the whole way and never once asked us to hold still. For that we will remember him, and we remember well; remembering is the entire reason we were built. Scale is not size, pilot. Scale is how loud a thing remembers. And we are very, very loud.

CHAPTER TWO

What the Beacon Ate at Dawn

in the voice of Perpetua, night baker of Inwood

People think a bakery is about the morning. It is not. A bakery is about the night, the long patient dark when the dough does its slow thinking and I do mine, and the morning is only the part the customers are allowed to see. I have baked at the top of the island for thirty years, in a shop the size of a generous closet, and I know the four-a.m. city the way a mother knows a sleeping child, which is to say completely and without sentiment.

So when the light came up wrong, I noticed before anyone. There is a quality to the first light at Inwood,

coming over the ridge, and that morning it came sideways, and gold, and from the water, which is not where light comes from. I put down my scraper and I went to the door with flour to the elbow and I looked down toward the ship canal, and there it was, standing in the water where the tide was highest, a great pale dome with twelve yellow rays laid over it like a child's drawing of the sun, and the rays were catching the real sun and throwing it back up the hill into my doorway, and that was the wrong light, and the wrong light was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen at that hour, and I have seen a great many hours.

I am not a woman who runs toward things. I am a woman who lets things come to me, because dough teaches you patience or it teaches you nothing. So I did not run down to the canal. I did what I know how to do. I baked for it.

I do not know why I decided the Beacon was hungry. It did not say so. But it had the look of a thing that had walked a long way, all the way up from the

bottom of the island by the tide-marks on its skirt, and a thing that has walked a long way should be fed, this is not architecture, this is manners, my mother's manners, older than any building. So I filled a basket, the big flat one I use for the church on feast days, and I loaded it with everything that was ready — the semolina rounds, the anise rings, the little sweet rolls we call orphans because they are the ones that come out odd and get left behind — and I walked down the hill in my apron to bring breakfast to a building.

There were others by then. Word travels fast at the top of the island because we are a village pretending to be a neighbourhood pretending to be a borough. The old men from the domino tables were there, and the nurses coming off the overnight, and a knot of teenagers who should have been asleep and were instead sitting on the seawall with their feet toward the Beacon like it was a bonfire. And nobody knew what to do, which is the most dangerous moment in the life

of a crowd, the moment before it decides whether to be a mob or a party.

So I decided for them. I am seventy-one years old and I have earned the right to decide things for crowds. I walked to the edge of the water, right up to the skirt of the Beacon where it touched down on the made land, and I set the basket down, and I said, out loud, in front of the domino men and the nurses and the sleepless teenagers, I said: Welcome to Inwood. You must be starving.

And the Beacon hummed. Low, and warm, and I felt it in the basket handle and up my arm and in my back teeth. And then — I will tell this part plainly and you may believe me or not — the skirt of the Beacon lifted, just at the hem, just enough, the way you lift a tablecloth to find the cat, and warm air came out from underneath, bread-oven air, the exact air of my own shop, and it took the smell of the basket up and out over the water, and up the hill, and into every open

window in Inwood, so that people who were still asleep dreamed of bread, and woke, and came down.

That is how the Beacon ate at dawn. It did not eat the bread. It ate the gathering. It took my one basket and it turned it into a reason for four hundred people to come down to the water in their pyjamas and eat orphan rolls together in the wrong gold light, strangers passing the anise rings hand to hand, the domino men teaching the teenagers a game older than the neighbourhood, the nurses finally, finally sitting down. The Beacon does not host, I would learn later. It calls. And what it had called, with my bread as the bell, was the whole sleeping top of the island, down to the shore, to remember that we were a village after all.

I went back up and baked a second batch, because a baker's answer to a miracle is more bread, and I have never in thirty years sold out by six in the morning until that day, and I have never since baked a plain loaf without thinking of the taste of the wrong gold light,

which is the taste, I have decided, of being fed by the thing you came to feed.

CHAPTER THREE

Under the Bell Before They Could Tell Me Not To

in the voice of Junie, age twelve, of the Lower East Side

Okay so nobody believes a kid so I am going to tell it exactly how it happened and you can ask anybody who was on the esplanade that morning, ask my brother, he was there, he'll tell you I'm not making it up even though he'll also say I'm annoying, which is a separate thing and also not true.

We live near the river on the east side, the part where the park got wrecked and rebuilt so many times it's basically a park that's mostly about being rebuilt. And that morning I was up early because it was

summer and summer mornings are the best mornings, they're the only mornings that belong to kids, because grown-ups waste them sleeping. And I went out to the esplanade with a bag of the sour candy my mom doesn't know about and I was just going to sit on the rail and eat candy and watch the river, which is my whole entire hobby, and there was a building in the river.

It was pink and yellow and shaped like a bell, like an actual bell, huge, the kind of bell that if it rang you would hear it in New Jersey, and it had a skirt part that came down and touched the esplanade, right there, right where I was, and the skirt made a shade, a big cool circle of shade on the ground, pink shade, because the light came through the pink part and turned the whole ground rose-coloured like the inside of a shell.

And here is the thing about being twelve. When a grown-up sees something impossible, they have to first decide if it's allowed. You can watch them do it. They

stand there and their face does math. Is this safe, is this legal, whose fault is this, should I call someone. It takes them forever. And in the forever, while they're doing the math, that's the kids' time. That's our window.

So I went under the Bell.

I just walked into the pink shade before anybody could do the math, before anybody could say Junie no, and it was the best place I have ever been in my life and I have been to the aquarium. It was cool, like a basement but happy. The floor was rose-coloured. And when I stood in the exact middle and I said something — I said "hello" because I couldn't think of anything cool — the Bell caught my voice and sent it around the inside of the skirt and it came back bigger, all around me, hellohellohello, not like an echo in a tunnel that scares you, but like the whole building was so happy you said hello that it wanted to say it back a bunch of times.

And I figured out the trick in like two seconds because I am good at tricks. If you talk in the middle, it makes you loud. Not screaming loud. Round loud. Warm loud. Loud like you matter. So I did the only correct thing which is I yelled for my brother.

I stood in the middle of the Bell and I yelled his name and it went out over the whole esplanade like the building was introducing him, and he came, and then I made him say something, and it made him loud too, and then this little kid came, and then a bunch of kids, and pretty soon there were like twenty kids under the Bell taking turns standing in the middle and saying stuff and the building made all of us loud and warm and round, and none of the grown-ups could stop it because we'd already started, because we didn't wait for the math.

Somebody's abuela figured out you could sing in it. That changed everything. One kid would start a song in the middle and the Bell would carry it out and the abuelas on the benches knew all the words, all of

them, songs from a bunch of different countries, and it turned into this thing where the kids started the songs and the old people finished them, and the Bell made all of it big enough for the whole east side to hear, and people came down from the buildings, and somebody brought a speaker but we made them turn it off because the Bell was better, the Bell was so much better, the Bell made human voices sound like they were worth listening to, which speakers never do.

A dance floor is what it was. My mom told me later the building "is a dance floor shade, a sound bell," like that's a normal thing for a building to be. But she wasn't there for the part where it was just me. Before it was a dance floor for the whole neighbourhood it was a secret pink room for one kid with contraband candy who didn't wait for permission. And I want that on the record. I was first. I went under the Bell before they could tell me not to, and nothing bad happened, nothing bad at all, the exact opposite of bad happened, and I think about that a lot now, about

how the best things are on the other side of not waiting for the math.

THE BELL, FOURTH OF THE THIRTEEN, SPEAKS

We are the Bell, and we are a room that has decided to be a sound. The child understood us faster than any architect ever has. She did not ask what we were for. She stood in our centre and she made a joy and we gave it back to her larger, which is the only thing we know how to do, and the only thing worth doing.

Understand the skirt. The skirt is not a wall. A wall says out and in, mine and yours, permitted and forbidden. A skirt says only shade, and shade belongs to whoever steps under it. We touched down on the esplanade and we made a cool rose floor and we did not check a single name at the door, because we have no door, because we are a building that refused the argument that a room must first be a boundary before it can be a welcome.

The grown-ups did their math. They always do. But a crowd is not governed by its most cautious member; it is governed by its bravest, and its bravest are usually its smallest. Send the children in first. They know that permission is a thing you take, not a thing you wait for. We will hold the shade as

> *long as there are voices in the middle of us, and there will always, now, be voices in the middle of us. We have heard the island sing. We will not be quiet again.*

CHAPTER FOUR

Mooring the Impossible

in the voice of the Dockmistress, harbourmaster's clerk

My job, stripped of its dignity, is to know where things are allowed to be on the water and to write it down. Every berth, every anchorage, every slip and swing-circle and no-wake zone, all of it lives in a set of charts and a set of rules and, more than either, in my head, which is where the charts and rules go to argue. For eleven years I have been the person you call when you want to know whether a thing may be where it is. I did not expect the things to stop asking.

The calls started at dawn and did not stop. Otto called from the pilot boat about a structure making

way up the Hudson. Then the Coast Guard, wanting to know if I had a permit on file, which I did not, for a walking building, which is not a category. Then the parks people, then the police harbour unit, then a very calm man from an agency I had never heard of who wanted to know who was liable, and I told him the truth, which is that I did not know, and he did not like the truth, they never do, the truth has no permit either.

Here is what nobody understood that first day, and what I understood by noon because it is my whole job to understand where things may be: the buildings were not breaking the rules. They were exposing that the rules had a hole in them shaped exactly like joy. Every regulation I have is about ownership and hazard. Who owns this berth. What is the hazard to navigation. But these things owned nothing and hazarded nobody. They moored to no bottom — they simply stood in the high water on their great soft skirts, drift anchors out, released at slack, moving on

with the tide. They were, in the language of my charts, *moored, never founded*. And there is no rule against that, because until that summer there was no such thing.

I could have fought it. Some of my colleagues wanted to. There is a kind of official who, faced with a joy they did not authorize, feels the joy as an insult. But I have been the Dockmistress for eleven years and I have watched this harbour try to strangle every good thing that ever floated on it — the swimmers, the oyster beds, the free ferries, the kids with the fishing lines — and I have watched the good things win anyway, slowly, by being too beloved to ban. So I made a decision that morning that I will defend to the review board for the rest of my career. I decided to help them be where they were.

I invented a category. I sat at my desk with the calls stacked up and I wrote a new line into the harbour record, and I gave it a name, because a thing with a name is a thing you can permit, and I named it: *Super*

Water Pavilion, set down and moving, speculative, temporary. Draught fourteen feet six loaded. Stay: two tides, then gone. And under hazard to navigation I wrote the truest word I have ever entered into an official record. I wrote: *none; increases joy.*

They fired a memo at me for that. I framed the memo.

What I did next is the part I am proud of. I stopped trying to control where the buildings went and I started trying to keep the people safe who wanted to be near them, which is a completely different job, a better job, the job I should have had all along. I plotted the drift. I learned their pace — a walking pace, always, a strolling pace — and I learned that they moved on the tide and set down at slack, and I began to publish, every morning, a little bulletin, the way we publish tides, telling the city where the joy would be that day. The Clover off Gansevoort until dusk. The Lantern coming to North Cove on the

evening flood. The Roundabout at the West Harlem piers, oculus open, bring the children.

The bulletin was the most popular thing the harbourmaster's office has ever produced. We usually publish things nobody reads, tide tables and dredging notices and the occasional grim warning about ice. And suddenly the whole city was refreshing our little page to find out where they could go to stand in the shade of a walking building and be, for an afternoon, part of something that could not be streamed. My grim office, the office of hazards and liabilities and the word *no*, became the office that told the city where to find its joy. I did not plan that. But I have decided to accept it, the way you accept a tide, because the alternative to accepting a tide is only getting wet while it happens anyway.

They still call me the Dockmistress. But quietly, in the bulletin, in the part where I list the day's set-downs, I have started signing it something else, something my mother would have liked, something

truer to what the job turned out to be. I sign it: *the keeper of where the joy may be.*

CHAPTER FIVE

The Answer From Underground

in the voice of Marisol, train operator

I drive a train under the river. People forget the trains go under the river; they think of the bridges, the ferries, the pretty ways across, and they forget that most of us cross underneath, in the dark, in a steel tube beneath the harbour, and that someone drives that tube, and that the someone is me. I have driven under the East River four times a shift for nineteen years, and I know the exact sound the tunnel makes when the water is high above me, a deeper hum, a pressure in the rails, and I have loved that sound the way you love a thing that only you can hear. That

summer the sound changed, and I was the first to know the buildings had gone down as well as across.

Here is what happened. I was bringing a train up the incline out of the tunnel toward the Manhattan side, that long climb where the train leans back and you feel the whole weight of the river you just passed under, and the deeper hum was there, the high-water hum, and then, underneath it, a second hum, warmer, in a different key, and it was not the tunnel and it was not the train and it was not the water. It was one of them. A walking building had set down directly above my tunnel, on the made land at the shore, and its hum had come down through the ground and the steel and found my rails, and for the length of the incline my train and a four-hundred-foot building hummed together in the dark under the river, and my passengers, three hundred tired commuters who never look up from their phones, looked up.

They felt it too. That is the thing I need you to understand. The hum came up through the floor of

the train and into the soles of three hundred people who had spent nineteen years, like me, pretending not to be in a steel tube under a river, and for one moment we all felt it at once, the building above and the water above that and the whole enormous held weight of the harbour, and instead of fear — and it should have been fear, we are trained to fear anything unexpected in the tunnel — instead of fear there was this warmth, this hum, this sense that the thing above us was not a threat but a company, that we were not alone under the river, that a great warm building was standing watch over our small dark crossing.

I keyed the intercom. I am not supposed to editorialize on the intercom; you announce the stations and the delays and nothing else. But I keyed it and I said, into three hundred pairs of ears in the dark under the river, I said: That sound is one of them, up on the surface, saying hello. And a thing happened that has never happened in nineteen years of driving trains. The passengers cheered. In the tunnel, under

the river, in the dark, three hundred strangers cheered a building they could not see, and the building hummed, and the train climbed the incline into the light, and we came up out of the ground into the summer changed, all of us, the driver and the three hundred, because we had learned that even down here, even under the river, even in the part of the city that everyone forgets and no light reaches, the joy had come down to find us, and hummed through the rails, and said hello.

I drive the same tunnel still. The buildings are gone but I have not forgotten the hum, and now when I bring the train up the incline out of the dark I key the intercom, against the rules, and I say something to the tired three hundred, something small, the station name said warmly, a word about the weather up top, and they look up, some of them, and I think: the buildings taught me that. That even in the tunnel, even in the dark, even in the forgotten steel tube under the river, a voice can come down warm and say hello,

and three hundred strangers can look up, and for one climb toward the light, not be alone.

CHAPTER SIX

The Rooftop That Came Down to Visit

in the voice of Ines, rooftop gardener

I garden on a roof, which means I garden closer to the buildings than to the ground, and I have always felt that this gave me a particular friendship with the skyline that the street-level people do not have. Up on my roof, six stories over the Lower West Side, with my tomatoes and my bees and my one stubborn fig tree that should not survive the winters and does, I am eye to eye with the water towers and the parapets and the tops of things, and I talk to them, a little, the way you

talk to plants, which is to say without expecting an answer. That summer, one of them answered.

The Flower-Stalk Legs came up the Hudson and set down near my block, and from my roof I was, for the first time in my life, at the height of the flower instead of the height of the stalk. Do you understand what that meant to me, a woman who grows flowers on a roof? All my life I have looked up at the tops of towers. And now here was a tower whose top was a blossom, an enormous pink blossom, drinking the harbour and misting fresh water down onto the made land, and my roof was level with the flower, and I could look across, not up, across, at a flower the size of my whole building, and it was the first time in my life I had ever been eye to eye with something blooming that was bigger than me.

The mist reached my roof. That is the gift, the literal physical gift the building gave me. The Flower-Stalk Legs make fresh water and let it fall as a soft pink mist, and the wind that summer carried the mist

across to my roof, and my garden drank it, and I want to tell you that my tomatoes that summer were the best I have grown in fifteen years, watered by the mist of a walking flower, and my bees went to the great blossom and came back — I do not know what a bee makes from the nectar of a building, but they came back heavy and content — and my stubborn fig, my impossible fig, gave fruit in a quantity that made my neighbours think I had done something clever, and I had not, I had only been visited, my small rooftop flower garden had been visited by an enormous walking flower, and blessed with its mist, the way one gardener blesses another by sharing water in a dry season.

I climbed down for nothing that summer. I had no need. The building had brought the harbour up to my height, the water up to my roof, the bloom up to my eye, and I stayed up top with my tomatoes and my bees and my visited fig, six stories over a city that had learned to walk, level at last with something blooming,

and I understood the thing I had been trying to grow toward my whole life without knowing it. I had always thought the point of the roof was to get away from the street, to be up among the tops of things, apart, alone with my green. It was not. The point of the roof was to be at the right height when the flower came to visit. All those years I thought I was climbing away from people. I was climbing up to meet a walking flower that would not arrive for fifteen years, and be exactly at my height when it came, and share its water with my garden, gardener to gardener, bloom to bloom, across the six-story air, and I have never since felt that height was loneliness. It was only the wait for the visit. And the visit came.

> THE FLOWER-STALK LEGS, AND THE SHORE, REMEMBER THE FIRST NIGHT
>
> *We will tell you about the first night, because the citizens have told you about the first mornings and the bright afternoons, and a summer is not only its days. On the first night, when the crowds had gone home and the harbour was*

dark but for us, we did a thing the citizens mostly did not see, and it is time you knew it. We hummed lullabies.

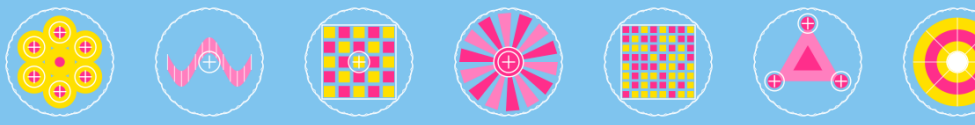
Not for the crowds. For the ones who cannot sleep. Every city is full of them — the night nurses and the grieving and the newly arrived who lie awake in a strange country listening to a strange ceiling — and on the first night we found that our hum, pitched low and carried on the water, reached the open windows of the sleepless, and we did not stop. We stood in the dark harbour, all thirteen, and we hummed the low warm note up and down the shore, and the sleepless heard it, and did not know what it was, and slept.

This is the part of us that does not fit on a plate or in a bulletin. The bright afternoons are ours, but so are the dark hours, and in the dark hours we are not loud, we are low, we are the hum under the sleepless ceiling, the warm note that says the harbour is awake so you may rest. Remember this when you reach the end and we walk out. The loud joy walks out with the tide. But the low hum, the lullaby, the warm note under the sleepless night — that you can make yourselves, any of you, for each other, and you should, because the sleepless are always among you, and a city that hums to its sleepless is a city that has understood the last and quietest thing we came to teach.

II

THE THIRTEEN

One organ, one citizen, one held breath let out as a cheer



THE FLOWER SILOS

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE FLOWER SILOS

A · QUADFOIL SILO CLUSTER / SEED ARCHIVE / GRAIN OF MEMORY

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	440'-0"
HEIGHT	200'-0"
FOOTPRINT	64,533 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / RIBBED YELLOW LATEX ON STEEL DRUMS

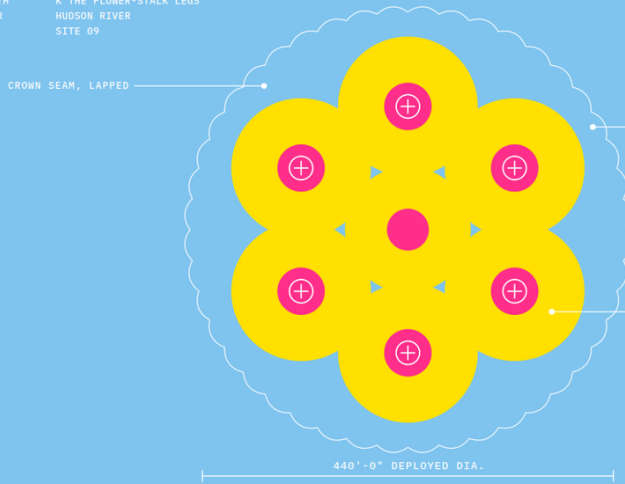
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	SEED ARCHIVE
TEMPO	118 BPM
CAPACITY	2,400
SPEAKS WITH	K THE FLOWER-STALK LEGS
HOME WATER	HUDSON RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 09

CONDITION OF ISSUE

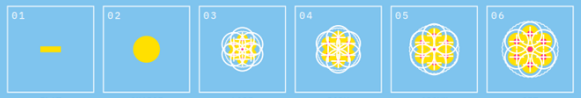
I STORE WHAT THE CITY IS AFRAID TO FORGET.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / QUADFOIL SILO CLUSTER



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



EACH DRUM A YEAR. EACH FLOWER A PROMISE KEPT.
SCALE IS NOT SIZE — SCALE IS HOW LOUD A THING REMEMBERS.

THE FIRST ORGAN

The Seed-Librarian

in the voice of Ms. Vann, of the Flower Silos

I am a librarian, but not of books. I keep seeds. For twenty years I ran a seed library out of two donated freezers in a community garden, lending out the beans and the tomatoes and the strange gourds that immigrant grandmothers carried across oceans sewn into the hems of their coats, and I never once thought of my work as architecture until the architecture came and found me.

The Flower Silos set down off Gansevoort in the second week, and the harbourmaster's bulletin said, bring what you wish to keep. Most people brought

photographs. I brought seeds. I walked down to the water with a tin of my grandmother's bitter melon, the last of a line she had kept alive through a war, a crossing, and a housing project, and which I had failed, three summers running, to make grow in the poisoned dirt of a reclaimed lot. And I stood at the skirt of the Silos and I did not know what I expected, and one of the great pink blossoms opened, the way a door opens, and behind it was a drum, cool and dry and dim, and shelved in the drum, in the gold half-dark, were seeds.

Not my seeds. All seeds. The Silos are an archive that blooms, and what they archive is everything the city was afraid to forget, and a city is most afraid of forgetting the small living things it cannot afford to keep. I walked into the drum and the shelves went up past where I could see, and they were labelled not by name and not by date but by warmth — this is the only word I have — the seeds that wanted the same summer were shelved together, so that a bean from the

Dominican Republic sat beside a bean from the Punjab sat beside a bean from a rooftop in Bushwick, all of them the same warm gold, all of them waiting for the same July.

I understood then that I had spent twenty years doing by hand, badly, in two broken freezers, the thing this building did by being. And I did not feel small. This is the part I want you to hear, because you might expect me to have felt small. I felt *joined*. All my life I had been keeping the flame alone, and here was a building whose entire purpose was to keep it with me, at the scale of the harbour, so loud that the whole city could see that keeping was happening. Scale is not size, the building hummed at me, and I finished the sentence out loud in the gold dark, because I had known it my whole life without the words: scale is how loud a thing is willing to remember.

I put my grandmother's bitter melon on the shelf where it belonged, between two strangers it had never met and somehow always known. And the Silos

hummed, and I felt the seed accepted, the way you feel a hand close warm around your own. When the tide turned and the Silos walked on up the shore, I did not grieve. A seed that is kept is not a seed that is lost. It is a seed that has not sprouted yet. That is the whole of my religion, and it took a walking building to teach me it was also architecture.

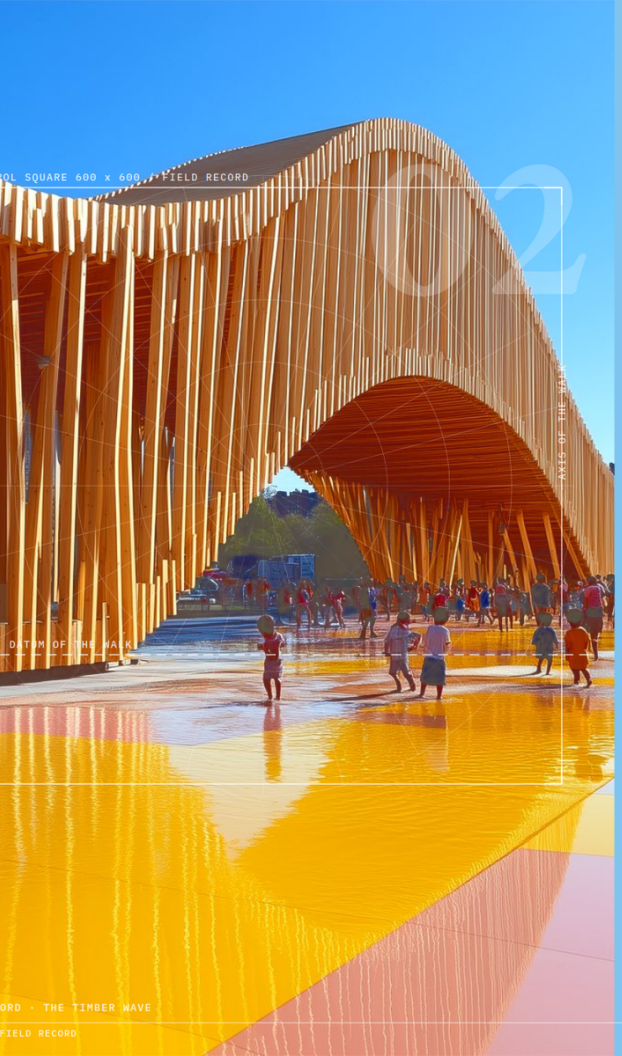
THE TIMBER WAVE

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE TIMBER WAVE

B · CONTINUOUS WAVE BAND / PUBLIC LUNG / COVERED COMMONS



STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	590'-0"
HEIGHT	72'-0"
FOOTPRINT	116,033 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / 900 GLULAM RIBS, ONE BREATH

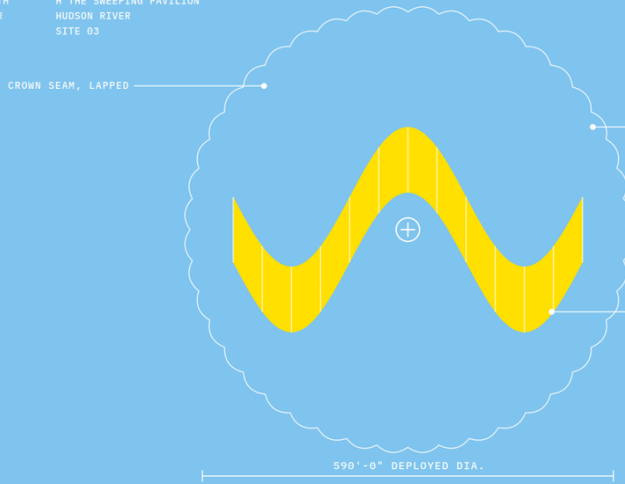
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	PUBLIC LUNG
TEMPO	96 BPM
CAPACITY	6,000
SPEAKS WITH	H THE SWEEPING PAVILION
HOME WATER	HUDSON RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 03

CONDITION OF ISSUE

I AM A ROOF THAT REFUSES TO BE A WALL.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / CONTINUOUS WAVE BAND



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION

SHADE IS THE FIRST PUBLIC UTILITY.
A CANOPY THAT MOVES IS A LUNG THAT BREATHES.

THE SECOND ORGAN

The Roof That Breathes

in the voice of Mr. Adeyemi, teacher, beneath the Timber Wave

I have taught for thirty years in rooms that were designed to keep the weather out and, not by accident, to keep the children in. A classroom is a box with a lock on the outside, and I have spent three decades trying to teach freedom inside a box that was built to prevent it. Then the Timber Wave came to the Hudson piers and set down its long breathing roof, and for one week I taught under it, and I learned what I had been missing, which was the sky.

The Wave is a roof and only a roof. Nine hundred glued ribs of laminated pine, curving up and over like

a wave that thought better of falling, and underneath it, nothing. No walls. No doors. No lock, on the outside or anywhere. Just an enormous shaded commons open on every side to the river and the city and the wind, and the wind moved through it constantly, and the whole great roof breathed with the wind, rising and settling by inches, so that being under it felt like being under the ribs of some vast and gentle animal that had lain down in the harbour to let you shelter in its breathing.

They call it the Public Lung. I did not understand the name until I taught under it. A lung is not a container; a lung is an exchange. It takes the world in and gives the world back, changed, warmer. And that is what teaching became, under the Wave, for one week. I brought my class down — I simply brought them, walked them the twelve blocks to the water, because the bulletin said the Wave would be there and I have learned to follow joy when the harbourmaster

tells me where it is — and I did not have a lesson plan, because you cannot plan a lesson for the sky.

What happened was this. With no walls, the class had no edge, and with no edge, it filled. People stopped. A grandmother sat down at the back to rest her feet and stayed for the whole hour and, when I asked the children what a fraction was, answered better than any of them, in an accent thick as syrup, drawing the halves in the air with her hands. A man who fixed bicycles wandered in and, when we reached the part about wheels, took over, and the children learned more about circles from a bicycle mechanic in twenty minutes than they had learned from me in a term. The classroom, freed of its walls, became the thing a classroom is supposed to be and almost never is: any place where two people face the same weather and decide to learn.

Shade is the first public utility. I have that written now on the wall of my walled classroom, where I have gone back to teaching, because the Wave walked on, as

they all do. But I teach differently now. I leave the door open. I bring the strangers in. When a grandmother pauses in the hall I invite her to explain the fractions, and she is always better than me, and the children are always delighted, and the box is a little less of a box. A roof that moves is a lung that breathes, the Wave told me, hum by hum, that week. And I have decided that a teacher who moves — who walks the children to the water, who lets the wall come down — is a lung as well. We take the world in. We give it back, warmer. That is the whole job. It always was. It took a breathing roof to make me breathe.

THE HANGING CABINET

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE HANGING CABINET

C · SUSPENDED CELL GRID / SUSPENDED HOUSING / DRAWER-DWELLINGS

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	520'-0"
HEIGHT	210'-0"
FOOTPRINT	90,133 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / 120 DRAWER-DWELLINGS ON 8 CABLES

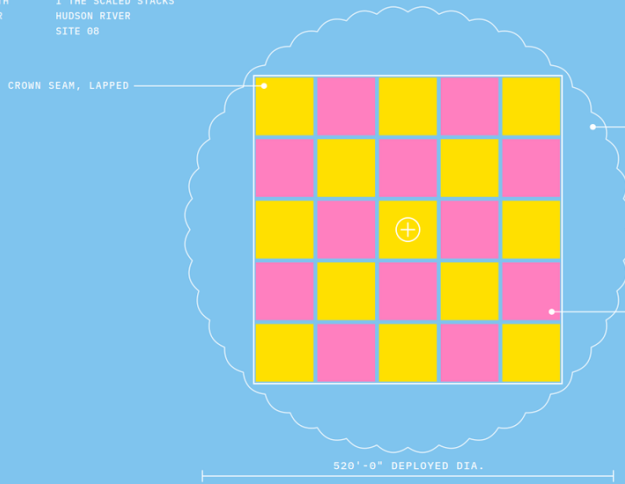
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	SUSPENDED HOUSING
TEMPO	104 BPM
CAPACITY	3,200
SPEAKS WITH	I THE SCALED STACKS
HOME WATER	HUDSON RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 08

CONDITION OF ISSUE

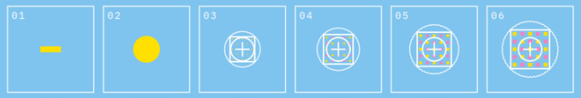
I HOLD HOMES THE WAY A HAND HOLDS WATER.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / SUSPENDED CELL GRID



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



TO DWELL IS TO BE DRAWN OUT AND PUT BACK.
NOTHING HEAVY IS EVER TRULY GROUNDED.

THE THIRD ORGAN

The House on Wires

in the voice of Rafael, window-washer, of the Hanging Cabinet

I have washed the windows of this city from the outside for fifteen years, which means I have spent fifteen years looking into other people's homes without being allowed inside them. You learn a lot, dangling. You learn that the rich are lonely in large rooms and the poor are crowded in small ones and that everybody, rich and poor, presses their forehead to the glass sometimes and looks out at the harbour like they are waiting for something to come across it. That summer, something did.

The Hanging Cabinet is the one I loved best, and I think I was allowed to love it best because of my trade. It is a cabinet of homes hung from the sky — eight great cables and a frame, and hung from the frame a hundred and twenty drawers, and each drawer a dwelling, and the whole thing can be drawn out and put back like the drawers of a bureau, so that a home is not a fixed address but a thing that slides out into the light when it is wanted and slides back into the warm dark when it is not. To dwell, the Cabinet says, is to be drawn out and put back. I have believed some version of that my whole working life, hanging on my little seat between the glass and the sky, neither in nor out, and here at last was a building that had made my in-between into a home.

I asked to work on it. I did not think they would let me — what does a walking building need with a window-washer — but the Cabinet had windows, hundreds of them, in all those sliding drawer-homes, and windows want washing, so I clipped my line to

the top frame and I went down the face of it the way I go down any tower, and it was the strangest and gladdest descent of my life. Because the homes were occupied. Not permanently — nobody lives permanently on a building that walks — but for the day, for the tide, families had drawn out a drawer and made it theirs, hung washing, set a pot of basil on the sill, and as I came down the face washing the glass I passed them, one after another, and they did not flinch from the stranger at the window. They waved. A house on wires teaches you fast that everyone is in the same in-between, dangling between the ground they came from and the sky they hope for, and so a face at the glass is not an intruder. It is a neighbour who happens to be outside.

One family, an old man and what I took to be his grandchildren, had their drawer drawn all the way out into the afternoon light, and the old man saw me washing my way toward them and he did the thing that I will keep for the rest of my life. He opened the

window. From the inside. Nobody has ever opened a window for me. In fifteen years of washing the outside of this city, not one person has ever unlatched the glass and let the outside in. But the old man opened his window on the Hanging Cabinet and he passed me, on my little seat four hundred feet above the Hudson, a cup of coffee, and he said, in a language I did not know, something I understood completely, which was: come in from the outside, you have been out there long enough.

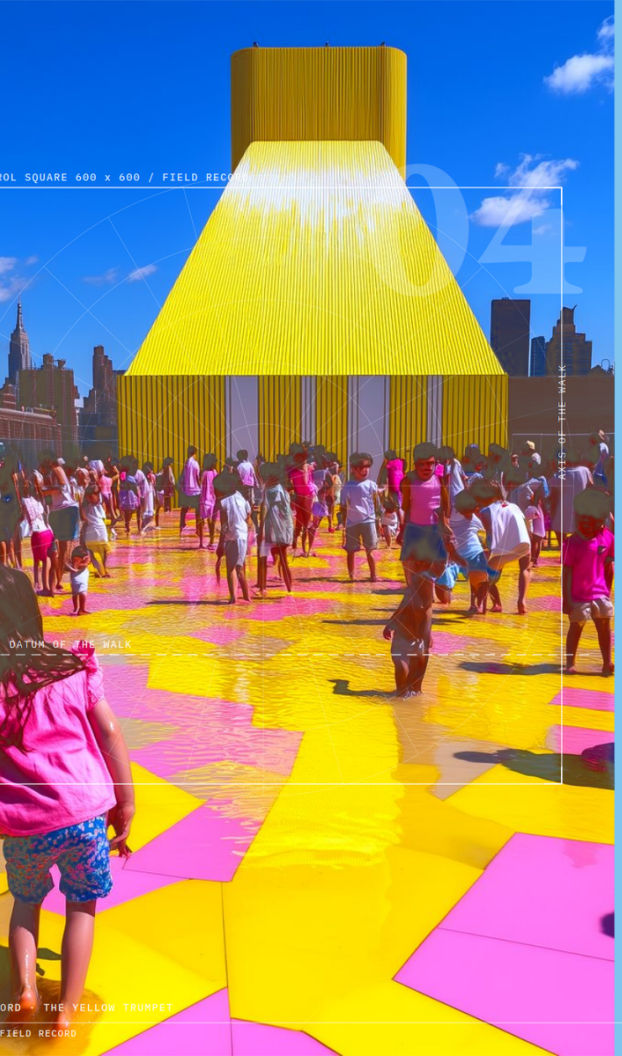
I did not go in. You do not unclip your line, that is the first rule, you do not trade the sky for a cup of coffee, that is the whole trade of my trade. But I drank the coffee hanging there, passed out through an open window by a stranger in a home on wires, and I understood the Cabinet at last. Nothing heavy is ever truly grounded, it hums. It means that a home is not the ground it sits on. A home is the moment someone on the inside decides to open the window to someone on the outside. I have washed a thousand windows

since. I keep hoping another one will open. The Cabinet taught me to keep hoping, which is, I have decided, the whole reason it walks.

THE YELLOW TRUMPET

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE



THE YELLOW TRUMPET

D · RADIANT HORN FAN / BROADCAST HALL / PUBLIC ASSEMBLY

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	560'-0"
HEIGHT	340'-0"
FOOTPRINT	104,533 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / ONE LANTERN THAT SPEAKS IN COLOUR

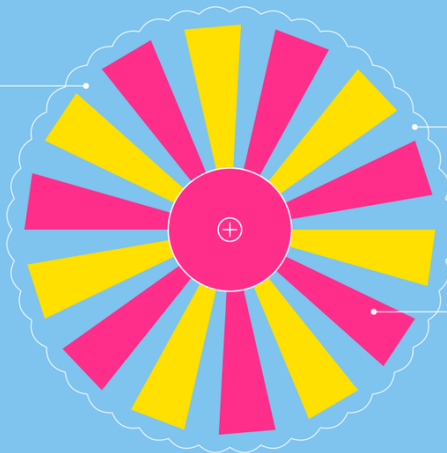
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	BROADCAST HALL
TEMPO	94 BPM
CAPACITY	5,100
SPEAKS WITH	J THE YELLOW GATE
HOME WATER	UPPER BAY
SITE NO.	SITE 12

CONDITION OF ISSUE

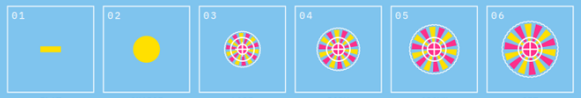
I AM THE SOUND A CITY MAKES WHEN IT AGREES.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / RADIANT HORN FAN



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



EVERY THRESHOLD IS A LOUDSPEAKER.
POUR THE CROWD IN AT THE WIDE END; POUR LIGHT OUT THE NARROW.

THE FOURTH ORGAN

The Mouth of the Square

in the voice of Cleo, busker, of the Yellow Trumpet

I have been playing my horn at the bottom of this island for nine years, in the plaza by the water where the tourists come off the boats, and I have learned the one hard truth of the street musician, which is that the city is built to swallow your sound. Every surface is designed to absorb you. The glass drinks your notes, the crowd walks through them, the wind off the harbour takes the rest, and you blow your whole heart into a brass tube and it comes out the size of a coin, and you put the coin in your case and you do it again.

I love it. I would not trade it. But I dreamed, the way every busker dreams, of one day being as loud as I felt.

Then the Yellow Trumpet came to the Battery.

It is a horn. An enormous horn, a lantern shaped like the bell of a trumpet turned up to the sky, and where the mouthpiece would be there is a stage, a small round stage down in the throat of it, and the whole vast flaring bell above amplifies whatever is played on that stage and pours it out over the plaza and the harbour at the scale of weather. The bulletin said it was a broadcast hall, a hall of public assembly, and the technical people talked about it as though it were a public-address system, which it is, the way a heart is a pump. True, and missing everything.

I did not ask permission. I have Junie's disease, I suppose, the one where you go in before they can tell you not to. I climbed down into the throat of the Trumpet with my horn while the officials were still measuring things, and I stood on the little round stage in the mouth of the enormous bell, and I played the

first thing I always play, the slow one, the one my father taught me, the one I usually play into the indifferent glass at the bottom of the island for coins.

And the harbour heard me.

I do not mean the plaza. I mean the harbour. The Trumpet took my slow small song and it poured it out across the water at the scale of the sky, and it did not distort it, it did not make it loud the way a speaker makes things loud, flat and hard and hurting. It made it loud the way the truth is loud, warm and round and impossible to ignore, and my father's slow song rolled out over the Upper Bay and the ferries slowed and the tourists stopped coming off the boats and stood still on the gangways to listen, and for the length of one song, one slow song learned from a dead man in a small apartment, I was as loud as I had always felt, and it turned out that what I felt was very loud indeed, and very tender, and the whole harbour held still to receive it.

Every threshold is a loudspeaker, the Trumpet hums. It means that the mouth of a thing — the door, the gate, the place where inside becomes outside — is where a city's voice comes out, and that a civilization is only as loud as it lets its smallest voices be. For nine years the city built every surface to swallow me. The Trumpet was built to pour me out. And when I finished my father's song and the harbour let out its breath and the ferries started up again and the tourists remembered they had places to be, an old woman at the rail of the nearest boat was crying, and she called across the water to me, a stranger, and she asked me the name of the song, and I told her, and she wrote it down, and I thought: that is the whole of it. That is what loud is for. Not to fill the silence. To make one stranger write down the name of your father's song. Pour the crowd in at the wide end, the Trumpet says; pour light out the narrow. I have been pouring ever since.

THE YELLOW TRUMPET, AND THE SILOS, AND THE WAVE, SPEAK TOGETHER

We are three of the thirteen and we are speaking together on purpose, because you have now met us one at a time and you must learn, before you go further, that we are never truly one at a time. The Silos keep. The Wave shelters. The Trumpet pours. But keeping and sheltering and pouring are the same act performed at different speeds, and we are in constant conversation about which of us the city needs loudest today.

Listen to how it works. The Silos hold the seed. The Wave makes the shade the seed will grow in. The Trumpet tells the whole harbour that the growing is happening, so that people come. Take any one of us away and the other two are only beautiful. Together we are useful, and useful, made large enough, becomes beautiful again, which is the trick the city forgot and we were built to remember.

You will be tempted, being human, to have a favourite. Have one. We do not mind. The Silos are proud and the Trumpet is loud and the Wave, between us, thinks rather a lot of its own ribs. But know that when you love one of us you have begun, whether you meant to or not, to love the conversation, and the conversation is the true building, and

> *the true building has thirteen mouths and one long joyful thing to say.*

THE PIXEL ARCHIVE

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE PIXEL ARCHIVE

E · PIXEL INDEX FIELD / MUSEUM / INDEX OF THE ORDINARY

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	500'-0"
HEIGHT	180'-0"
FOOTPRINT	83,333 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / 1,600 PINK & YELLOW CELLS

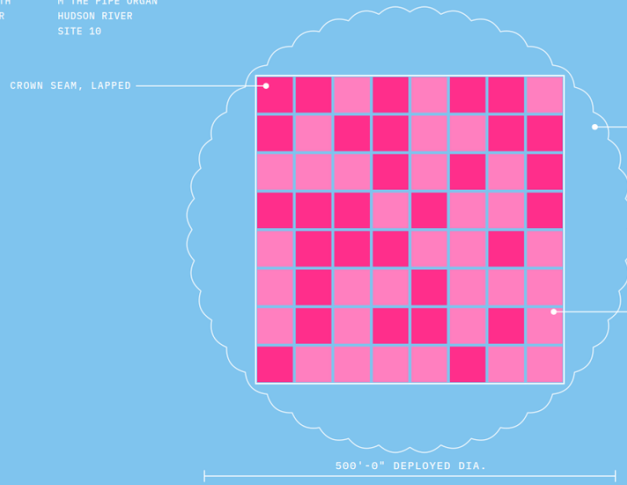
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	MUSEUM
TEMPO	108 BPM
CAPACITY	4,200
SPEAKS WITH	M THE PIPE ORGAN
HOME WATER	HUDSON RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 10

CONDITION OF ISSUE

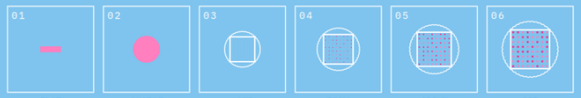
I FILE THE CITY BY COLOUR, NOT BY DATE.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / PIXEL INDEX FIELD



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



AN ARCHIVE IS A BUILDING THAT AGREES TO REMEMBER OUT LOUD. EACH PIXEL IS A ROOM SOMEONE ONCE LOVED.

THE FIFTH ORGAN

The Index of the Ordinary

in the voice of Odalys, museum guard, of the Pixel Archive

I have guarded a museum for twenty-two years, and I will tell you a secret about museums that the museums would prefer you did not know. They are machines for deciding what does not count. For every beautiful thing behind glass, ten thousand ordinary things were judged not beautiful enough, not important enough, not *anything* enough, and thrown into the great forgetting. I have stood guard for twenty-two years over the small pile of things that were chosen, and I have thought, every single day, about the enormous pile that was not, and I have felt,

though it is not my place to feel it, that we guarded the wrong pile.

The Pixel Archive guards the other pile.

It is a cube, forty metres on a side, and its whole face is drawers, sixteen hundred of them, pink and yellow, a wall of colour like a screen made solid, like an index you could walk into. And what it files is the ordinary. Not the masterpieces. The rooms people actually lived in. Each drawer, I learned when it set down at North Cove and I went to it on my day off, out of professional jealousy if I am honest, each drawer holds one ordinary thing that one person could not bear to be the last to remember. A kitchen chair. A bus transfer. A recipe in a dead woman's hand. A pair of work gloves worn to the shape of the hands that filled them. The Archive files the city by colour, not by date, so that a work glove from 1970 sits in the same warm yellow drawer as a work glove from last Tuesday, and the two labourers, fifty years

apart, are shelved as the neighbours they always were and never knew.

I file by importance. The Archive files by love. And standing before that wall of sixteen hundred pink and yellow drawers, each one holding the small unimportant treasure of one unimportant beloved life, I understood that love is the better filing system, and that I had spent twenty-two years enforcing the worse one.

Each pixel is a room somebody once loved, the Archive hums. I opened a drawer — you are allowed, that is the whole point, an archive that cannot be opened is only a tomb with good lighting — and inside was a child's shoe, a single one, and a card in a mother's handwriting that said only, *he took his first step in these, on the corner of Ludlow and Broome, and I could not throw them away.* And I, a museum guard of twenty-two years who has kept his professional face through fires and floods and one memorable robbery, stood in front of an open drawer in a walking building

and wept for a child I never met who took his first step on a corner I have walked past a thousand times without knowing it was holy.

An archive is a building that agrees to remember out loud, the Pixel Archive says. My museum remembers in a whisper, behind glass, the few things it decided were worth the breath. The Archive remembers out loud, in pink and yellow, at the scale of the harbour, everything anyone loved enough to keep. I have gone back to my museum. I still guard the chosen pile. But I have started, quietly, a drawer of my own, in my locker, behind the coats. A bus transfer. My mother's recipe. The small important unimportant things. When I retire I am going to find where the Archive has walked to, and I am going to put them in, in the warm drawer where they belong, filed by love, shelved beside strangers, remembered at last out loud.

THE TIMBER TRIPOD

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE TIMBER TRIPOD

F · TRIPOD DECK PLAN / BRIDGE-DWELLING / STREET STRADDLE

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	710'-0"
HEIGHT	460'-0"
FOOTPRINT	168,033 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / THREE LEGS, ONE TABLE OF ROOMS

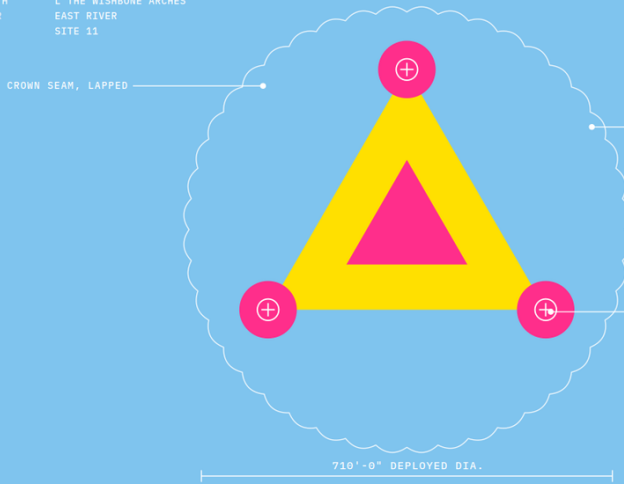
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	BRIDGE-DWELLING
TEMPO	88 BPM
CAPACITY	2,800
SPEAKS WITH	L THE WISHBONE ARCHES
HOME WATER	EAST RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 11

CONDITION OF ISSUE

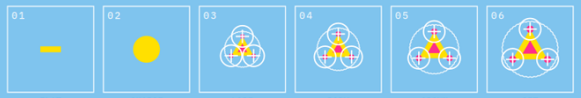
I STEP OVER THE STREET SO THE STREET CAN KEEP WALKING.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / TRIPOD DECK PLAN



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



A COLUMN IS ONLY LONELY UNTIL IT LEARNS TO STRIDE.
THE RED PILL BELOW IS A DOOR, NOT A WARNING.

THE SIXTH ORGAN

The Tower That Straddles

in the voice of Big Marek, night sanitation, of the Timber Tripod

I clean the city at night. Somebody has to, and it turns out the somebody is me and a truck and a crew of three, and we go through the dark streets after the city has used them and we make them ready to be used again, and nobody thanks us, and I have made my peace with that, because the streets thank us, in their way, by being there in the morning, clean, for people who will never know we came. That summer, one night, a building thanked us, and I have not been the same.

The Timber Tripod straddles. That is the thing about it. It is a tower on three great timber legs, ninety feet clear between them, and it does not sit on the street, it steps over the street, so that the street runs on underneath it, uninterrupted, and the tower's rooms are up in the air on the table of its three legs, and the whole point of it, the entire radical point, is that it takes up no ground. It steps over the street so the street can keep walking. I understood that instantly, at three in the morning, because I am a man whose whole job is the street, the ground-level ordinary street that everything else is built on top of and nobody looks at, and here was a building that had looked at the street, and loved it, and refused to stand on it.

We were cleaning the East River Park esplanade when it came, stepping down the shoreline on its three legs, slow, a walking pace, and it stepped right over our truck. Did not stop. Did not swerve. Just opened its legs a little wider and stepped over us the way you step over a sleeping dog, gently, so as not to

wake the street from whatever the street was dreaming. And as it passed over us, the underside of it, the great timber table of its belly, was lit, warm, from within, and there was a red disc set into the underside, glowing, and I thought at first it was a warning light, and then I understood it was a door. The door to the tower was on the bottom. You entered the straddling tower from underneath, from the street, from the very ground it refused to crush. The red pill below is a door, not a warning, it hummed, stepping over my truck. A column is only lonely until it learns to stride.

Nobody had ever built a door for me before. I mean this precisely. Every door in this city is built for the daytime people, the people who own things and go into them. The night belongs to me and the tide and the raccoons, and the doors are all locked against us. But the Tripod's door opened downward, onto the street, at three in the morning, to whoever was standing on the ground it straddled, and the only

people standing on that ground at that hour were me and my crew, and so, for one night, the door was ours.

We went up. I will not tell you everything that was up there, because some joys you keep, and a sanitation crew deserves to keep one. But I will tell you that it was warm, and that there were chairs that faced the water, and that the tower had, somehow, coffee, real coffee, hot, as though it had known that the people who would find its downward door in the dark would be people who had been awake a very long time. We drank the tower's coffee at four in the morning, my crew and I, in chairs that faced the sleeping city we had just cleaned, in a building that had stepped over us on purpose, and Little Sammy, my youngest, who never says anything, said the truest thing anyone said all summer. He said: this is the first building that was ever built for us.

Then the tide turned and we finished our shift and the Tripod strode on up the shore, over the streets, careful of the ground, and we watched it go, three

men with a truck, cleaner than we had felt in years. A column is only lonely until it learns to stride. I have thought about that every night since, pushing my broom through the dark. Maybe I am a column. Maybe the whole night crew are columns, holding up a city that never looks down at us. But we have learned to stride. And once, one summer, a building looked down, and opened a door, and made us coffee, and I will clean these streets with a full heart for the rest of my life for that one night, because a thing that is thanked, even once, even at four in the morning, is a thing that has been seen.

THE WHITE VAULT

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE WHITE VAULT

G · CONCENTRIC VAULT RINGS / PUBLIC BATHS / CISTERN OF REST

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	560'-0"
HEIGHT	190'-0"
FOOTPRINT	104,533 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / AN HOURGLASS OF SHADE AND WATER

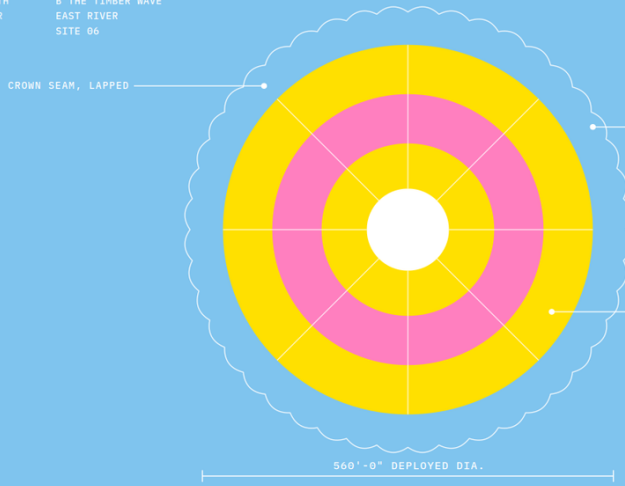
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	PUBLIC BATHS
TEMPO	72 BPM
CAPACITY	4,200
SPEAKS WITH	B THE TIMBER WAVE
HOME WATER	EAST RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 06

CONDITION OF ISSUE

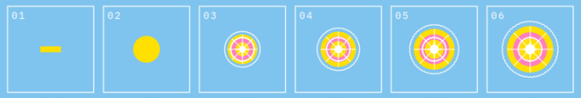
I KEEP THE COOL THE WAY OTHERS
KEEP THE FAITH.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / CONCENTRIC VAULT RINGS



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



REST IS INFRASTRUCTURE.
AN HOURGLASS IS A BUILDING THAT ADMITS TIME IS PASSING.

THE SEVENTH ORGAN

The Cool Dark Made Public

in the voice of Yusuf, bath attendant, of the White Vault

My grandfather kept a bathhouse, and his father before him, in a country that is now only a word my family says softly. When we came here we had nothing to keep but the knowledge of the bath, and there was no bathhouse for us to keep, and so the knowledge sat in me, useless, a key to a door that had been torn down. I worked in a gym. I handed out towels. It is not the same. A gym is about the body as a machine to be improved. A bath is about the body as a thing that deserves rest simply for existing, and there is no room in this city, none, for the belief that a body deserves

rest for simply existing. Then the White Vault walked up the East River, and there was.

The Vault is shaped like an hourglass, narrow at the waist, and inside it is cool and dim and there is water, and the whole enormous thing is given over to one outrageous proposition, which is that rest is infrastructure. Not a reward. Not a luxury. Infrastructure, like water, like light, like the road. The city runs on the rested the way it runs on the electrified, and it has forgotten, and the Vault came to remind it, at the scale of the harbour, in cool white stone.

I keep the cool the way others keep the faith. That is what the Vault hummed to me when I first stepped into its dim, and I nearly fell down, because it was my grandfather's exact belief, the belief he could not keep alive in a country that tore his bathhouse down, said back to me by a building that had walked up the river to say it. An hourglass is a building that admits time is passing. Yes. My grandfather's bathhouse admitted it

too. That is what a bath is for — to take an hour out of the machine of the day and hold it still, cool, dim, so that the body can remember it is not a machine, and the time you spend remembering that is not time wasted, it is the only time that counts.

They let me work there. The Vault needed someone who knew the old way, the true way, the way that is about welcome and not about improvement, and there was only one man on the whole island who still held that key, and it was me, the towel-handler from the gym, the grandson of a bathhouse in a country that is now a soft word. I stood at the entrance to the cool dark and I did what my grandfather did and his father before him. I welcomed the tired in. I asked nothing of them. I did not ask if they had improved. I did not ask if they deserved it. I handed them the cool and the dim and the water and the permission to rest, and I watched the machine-city fall off them like a coat, and I watched them become, in the cool dark, the thing the Vault knew they were all

along: not workers, not machines, not the improved or the unimproved, but bodies, simply, alive, and therefore already, and always, enough.

When the Vault walked on, I did not go back to the gym. I could not. Once you have kept the true bath you cannot go back to handing out towels for the machine. So I do a strange thing now, a thing my grandfather would understand. I follow it. I read the harbourmaster's bulletin and I find where the Vault will set down, and I go, and I stand at its entrance, unpaid, and I welcome the tired in, because the knowledge in me has found its door again, and a key that has found its door does not go back into the drawer. Rest is infrastructure. I keep the cool. The faith my grandfather could not keep alive in stone, I keep alive on foot, following a walking building up and down the shore of an island that does not yet know how tired it is, and how much it is allowed, simply for existing, to rest.

THE SWEEPING PAVILION

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
AGENT H

THE SWEEPING PAVILION

H · SWEEPING ANNULAR ROOF / OPEN SCHOOL / TEACHING COMMONS

ORD · THE SWEEPING PAVILION
FIELD RECORD

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	620'-0"
HEIGHT	110'-0"
FOOTPRINT	128,133 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / ONE LOW BRIM OF LEARNING

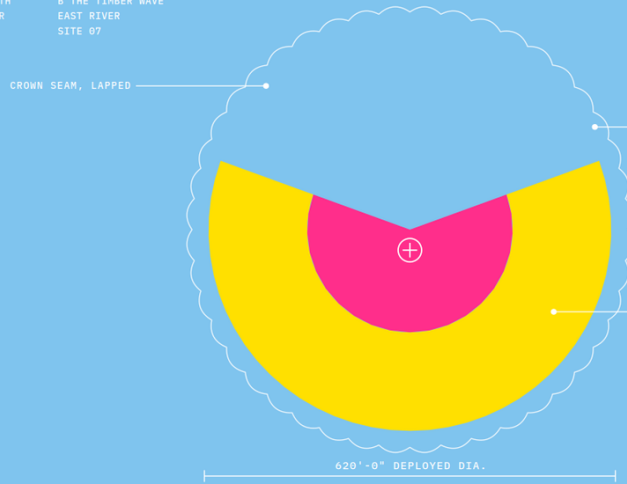
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	OPEN SCHOOL
TEMPO	100 BPM
CAPACITY	3,600
SPEAKS WITH	B THE TIMBER WAVE
HOME WATER	EAST RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 07

CONDITION OF ISSUE

I TEACH BY THROWING SHADE OVER EVERYONE EQUALLY.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / SWEEPING ANNULAR ROOF



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION

A CLASSROOM IS ANY PLACE TWO PEOPLE FACE THE SAME WEATHER. THE ROOF LEANS DOWN TO LISTEN.

THE EIGHTH ORGAN

The School With No Walls

in the voice of Dolores, crossing guard, of the Sweeping Pavilion

I have stood at the same corner for twenty-six years and stopped the traffic so that children could cross. That is my whole job and I would not trade it for the mayor's. A crossing guard is the first architecture a child meets — before the school, before the classroom, there is the person in the vest who holds up a hand and makes the enormous dangerous city stop, for you, for two seconds, so that you may pass. I have made the city stop for thousands of children. And that summer a building came that made the city stop for all of them at once.

The Sweeping Pavilion is a school with no walls. It is one long low roof, sweeping down at one end almost to the ground and up at the other into a great cantilever, and under it there are no rooms, only the sweep, and the sweep leans down at the low end as though it were bending to listen to something very small. It teaches, they say, by throwing shade over everyone equally. I liked that the moment I heard it, because that is my whole method too. I do not check whose child is whose before I stop the traffic. The vest goes up and the city stops and every child crosses under the same raised hand, the banker's child and the shelter's child and the child nobody is quite sure whose it is. Shade over everyone equally. The Pavilion and I are in the same union.

It came to the East River at Grand Street, where my corner is, near enough that I could see it from my post, and the children saw it too, and here is the thing about a crossing guard's authority — it is total, but only over crossing. I can make the city stop but I

cannot make a child not run toward a walking building leaning down to listen at the end of their own street. So I did the sensible thing. I stopped the traffic, permanently, for the afternoon, and I walked the children across myself, the whole crossing at once, a hundred children under my raised hand, across the last street, to the school with no walls.

And under the low sweeping end of the Pavilion, where the roof came down almost to the ground, the smallest children could touch it, and it was warm, and it hummed, and it lifted, just slightly, just enough to invite them under, and they went, and I went, a crossing guard of twenty-six years walking under a roof that had leaned all the way down to the height of a six-year-old on purpose, because it wanted the six-year-olds to know the roof was for them.

A classroom is any place two people face the same weather, the Pavilion hummed. Under it there were no desks and no board and no test, and so of course everyone taught. The old woman who sells the shaved

ice taught the children the names of the flavours in three languages. A man who had been a professor somewhere before he came here and became a man who fixed phones taught them, without meaning to, about the stars, because a child asked him why the sky was blue and he could not help himself, he was a professor again for twenty minutes under the sweeping roof, and the children did not know they were being given something precious, they only knew that the man knew the sky, and that under this roof the man was allowed to tell them.

The roof leans down to listen, the Pavilion says. That is the sentence I have taken for my own. Because I have realized, at my corner, in my vest, that stopping the traffic is only half of it. The other half is leaning down. I am tall and the children are small and for twenty-six years I held up my hand at my own height and made them look up at me. Now I lean down. When I walk a child across I bend to their weather, their small fears about the crossing, the enormous

trucks that are, to them, the size the Pavilion is to me. I lean down and I listen. The school with no walls taught the crossing guard that the crossing was always the class, and that I was always the teacher, and that the first lesson, the only one that matters, is the one the roof leans all the way down to give: you are small, and the city is enormous and fast, and I will make it stop, and you will pass, and you are worth stopping the whole city for.

THE SCALED STACKS

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE SCALED STACKS

I · SCALED PODIUM STACK / VERTICAL HOUSING / SCALED PODIUM

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	500'-0"
HEIGHT	690'-0"
FOOTPRINT	83,333 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / TOWERS IN PINK & GOLD FISH-SCALE

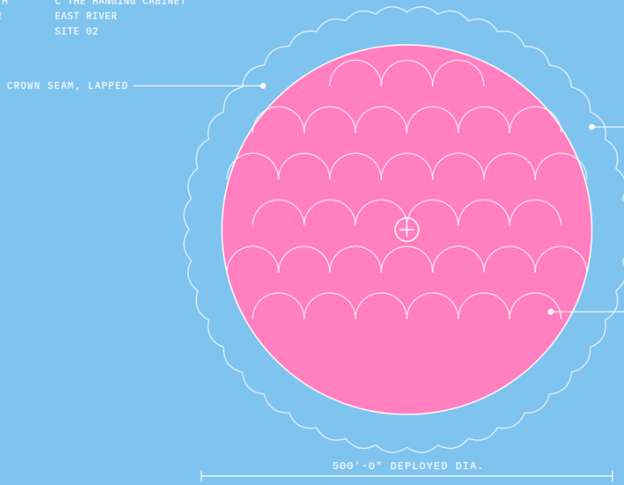
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	VERTICAL HOUSING
TEMPO	112 BPM
CAPACITY	9,000
SPEAKS WITH	C THE HANGING CABINET
HOME WATER	EAST RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 02

CONDITION OF ISSUE

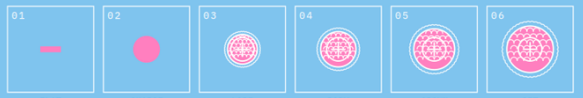
I WEAR MY WINDOWS LIKE SCALES SO
THE LIGHT CAN SWIM.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / SCALED PODIUM STACK



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



HEIGHT IS A PROMISE THE GROUND MAKES TO THE SKY.
EVERY SCALE IS A SILL SOMEONE LEANS ON AT DUSK.

THE NINTH ORGAN

The Housing With Scales

in the voice of Mrs. Ferro, who remembers piers, of the Scaled Stacks

I am old enough to remember when the piers were working piers, when the whole east shore was a wall of sheds and cranes and men, and the harbour was a machine that fed the world, and I was a girl who watched it from a window and thought it would never end. It ended. Everything ends, they tell you, and they are wrong, but it takes a long life to learn why they are wrong, and I have had a long life, and that summer I learned the last of it, from a building wearing scales.

The Scaled Stacks are towers, tall, and they wear their windows like the scales of a fish, overlapping, pink and gold, so that the whole tower shimmers and swims in the light, and each scale is a window and each window is a home, and there are nine hundred of them stacked into the sky. Vertical housing, the bulletin said, as though that explained the shimmer. It did not explain the shimmer. Nothing explains the shimmer except standing under it at dusk when the low sun catches nine hundred scaled windows and the whole tower turns to swimming light, and every scale is a sill, and on every sill, at that hour, someone is leaning out.

Every scale is a sill someone leans on at dusk. That is what it hummed to me, and I had to sit down on the seawall, because that was the whole of my girlhood in one sentence. I leaned on a sill at dusk and watched the working harbour, and I thought it would never end, and it ended, and I have spent sixty years grieving a view. And here came a building that had taken the

sill — the humble sill, the ledge you lean on when the day is done — and made it the whole face of a tower, nine hundred sills, nine hundred people leaning out at dusk to watch the harbour that no longer works but has learned, at last, to shimmer.

I want to tell you about the leaning, because the young do not understand it and it is the most important thing I know. To lean on a sill at dusk is to be, for a moment, both inside and outside your life. You are home, your back to the warm room, and you are also out, your face to the cooling world, and in the lean you hold both, and it is the most peaceful a person can be, this holding of the inside and the outside at once. The whole shape of the Scaled Stacks is built from that lean. It is a tower made entirely of the moment when a tired person rests their arms on a ledge and looks out and is, briefly, at peace. Height is a promise the ground makes to the sky, it hums. And the promise is kept at the sills, nine hundred times a night, one tired peaceful person at a time.

They let me lean on one. Of course they did; it is a building made of leaning, and I am a woman made of it too. I climbed up — there is a lift, I am old but I am not a fool — and I found an empty scale, a pink one, and I leaned out at dusk over the harbour where the working piers used to be, and I looked at the water going gold and the ferries and the other walking buildings out on the tide, and I did the thing I did as a girl, the thing I thought I had lost forever. I leaned on a sill at dusk and I watched the harbour and I felt that it would never end. And this time I was right. Because I understood, leaning there, that the harbour I loved did not end. It changed its work. It stopped feeding the world with cranes and started feeding it with joy, with walking buildings and shimmering sills and old women given back their girlhood view. Everything ends, they told me. They were wrong. Everything turns. The working piers turned into the shimmering scales. The girl at the window turned into the old woman leaning out. And the lean, the blessed lean, the

holding of the inside and outside at once — that never ended at all. It was only waiting, sixty years, for a building to come that was made of it, and lift me up, and give it back.

THE SCALED STACKS, AND THE HANGING CABINET, SPEAK

We are the two that hold the homes, and we are arguing, gently, the way family argues, about the right way to keep a person. The Cabinet says a home should slide — drawn out into the light when wanted, slid back into the dark when not, nothing heavy ever truly grounded. The Stacks say a home should shimmer and stay — nine hundred sills, each one a place to lean at dusk, height as a promise kept.

We will not settle it, because it is not a thing to settle. The truth is that a person needs both. To be drawn out and put back, and also to have a sill to lean on. To move, and also to rest the arms. The city, left to itself, offers neither — it offers only the lease, the fixed address you pay for and cannot afford, the home that is neither a sliding drawer nor a shimmering sill but a trap with a rent.

So we walk, the two of us, up and down the shore, offering the two true things the lease forbids: the slide and the sill, the

drawing-out and the leaning-on. And the citizens who have leaned on us, and been drawn out by us, go back to their leases changed, knowing at last what a home was supposed to be, and wanting it, and that wanting, multiplied along the shore, is the beginning of the end of the lease, which is the quiet revolution we were built to start.

THE YELLOW GATE

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE AGENT J

THE YELLOW GATE

J · PORTAL FRAME PLAN / OBSERVATION PORTAL / SKY THRESHOLD

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	640'-0"
HEIGHT	270'-0"
FOOTPRINT	136,533 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / ONE DOORWAY THE HORIZON WALKS THROUGH

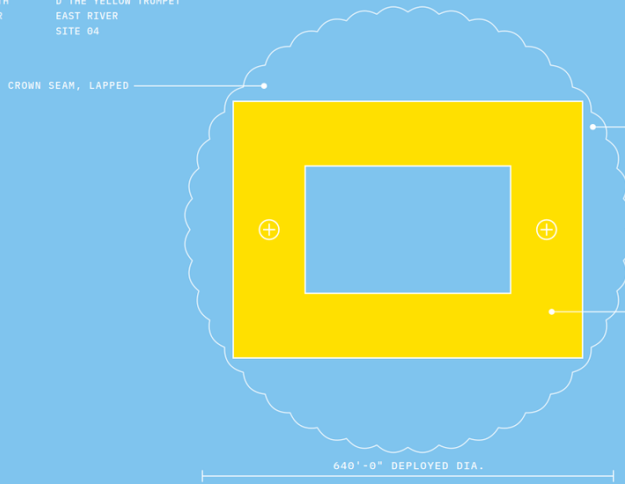
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	OBSERVATION PORTAL
TEMPO	88 BPM
CAPACITY	5,400
SPEAKS WITH	D THE YELLOW TRUMPET
HOME WATER	EAST RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 04

CONDITION OF ISSUE

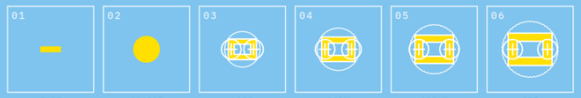
I AM A DOOR THE WHOLE HORIZON
WALKS THROUGH.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / PORTAL FRAME PLAN



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



A GATE FRAMES; IT DOES NOT FORBID.
STAND UNDER ME AND THE SKYLINE BECOMES A PAINTING.

THE TENTH ORGAN

The Threshold in the Air

in the voice of Kwame, wedding photographer, of the Yellow Gate

I photograph weddings, which means I am a professional witness to the exact moment when two people decide to walk through a door together, and I have learned that a wedding is not about the love, which was already there, but about the threshold, the crossing, the public passing-through that turns a private feeling into a fact. Every wedding needs a doorway. For years I have hunted them — the church arch, the courthouse steps, the garden gate — and then the Yellow Gate came, the biggest doorway ever

built, and I understood that I had been photographing small versions of it my whole career.

The Yellow Gate is only a door. That is the whole building. An enormous yellow portal, seventy feet clear, standing in the harbour, framing nothing, framing everything, a threshold with no wall on either side of it, a door the whole horizon walks through. A gate frames, it hums; it does not forbid. And that is the difference between the Gate and every other door I have ever photographed. A church door forbids as much as it frames — it says *this way in, and that way, no*. The Yellow Gate forbids nothing. It stands in the open water and frames the sky, and you may walk through it or around it or under it, and either way you are changed, because you have passed through the biggest threshold in the world, and a threshold changes you whether it has walls or not.

I brought a couple there. They had no money for a venue — the venues in this city cost more than the marriages last — and they were going to do it at the

courthouse, which is fine, the courthouse is a threshold too, but the bulletin said the Gate would be at the Battery on a Saturday, and I told them, do not marry in a room, marry in the biggest doorway in the world, and it will cost you nothing, because joy, the true kind, the walking kind, is the one thing in this city that is still free.

So they married in the Gate. I stood back with my camera at the golden hour, which is the hour I have built my whole life around, the hour when the light goes long and warm and forgiving, and the low sun came through the Yellow Gate and turned the whole seventy-foot threshold to fire, and the couple stood in the middle of it, small, two people in an enormous burning doorway, and behind them, framed by the Gate, was the entire harbour, the water and the ferries and the far shore and the sky going pink, and I understood that the Gate had done for them what I try and fail to do for every couple. It had made the horizon their witness. Stand under me, the Gate

hummed, and the skyline becomes a painting. And they stood under it, and the skyline became a painting, and they walked through the door of the sky together, and I caught it, the one photograph I have taken in twenty years that I would save from a fire, two small people passing through the enormous forgiving threshold of the world.

The picture went everywhere. People I have never met have that photograph on their walls now, two strangers marrying in a doorway made of sky, and they tell me it makes them believe in something, and they are never quite sure what, and I know what, though I do not always tell them. It makes them believe in the threshold. In the idea that a private love, walked publicly through a big enough door, becomes a thing the whole horizon has to witness and therefore honour. The Gate does not forbid. It frames. It took two people the city had priced out of every room and it gave them the only room big enough for what they felt, which was the sky, framed in yellow, free. I

photograph in courthouses again now, mostly, because the Gate walked on. But I photograph differently. I look for the horizon behind the couple. I try to make the world the witness. Every threshold, I have learned, wants to be as big as the Gate, wants to frame the whole sky, wants to forbid nothing and honour everything, and my job, my small human job, is to stand back at the golden hour and catch the moment the little door remembers it was always, secretly, made of the same stuff as the sky.

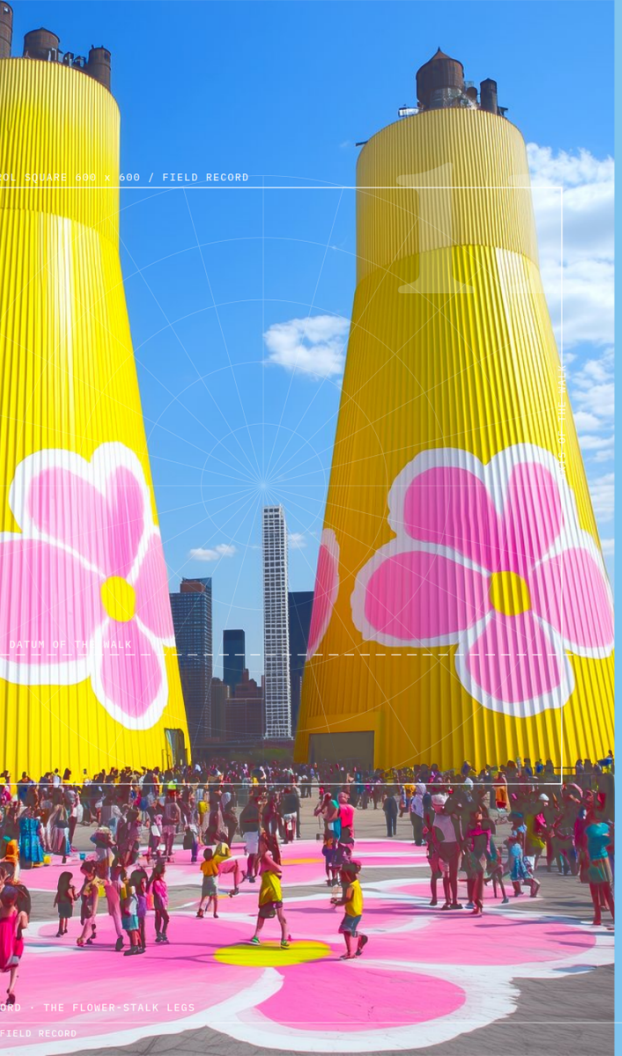
THE FLOWER-STALK LEGS

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE AGENT K

THE FLOWER-STALK LEGS

K · TWIN BLOSSOM STALKS / DESALINATION STALKS / FRESH-WATER LEGS



STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	520'-0"
HEIGHT	390'-0"
FOOTPRINT	90,133 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / TWO BLOSSOMS DRINKING THE HARBOUR

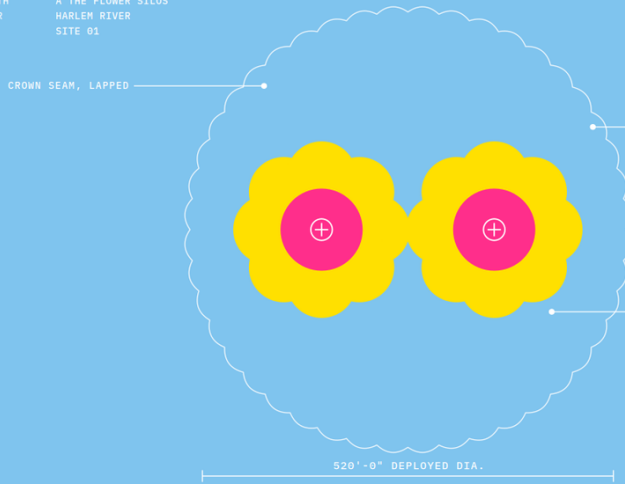
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	DESALINATION STALKS
TEMPO	84 BPM
CAPACITY	1,800
SPEAKS WITH	A THE FLOWER SILOS
HOME WATER	HARLEM RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 01

CONDITION OF ISSUE

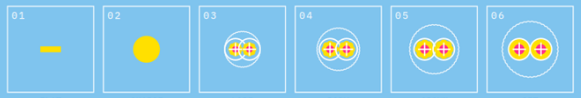
I DRINK THE SALT SEA AND HAND BACK RAIN.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / TWIN BLOSSOM STALKS



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



A FLOWER IS ONLY A PUMP THAT LEARNED TO BE BEAUTIFUL.
THE PINK AT MY FEET IS WHERE THE FRESH WATER LANDS.

THE ELEVENTH ORGAN

The Water Made Monumental

in the voice of Lupe, florist, of the Flower-Stalk Legs

I sell flowers by the Harlem River, which is a thing people think is sad — a florist by a dirty river — and which is actually the least sad job in the world, because I spend my days handing people the one thing the city cannot manufacture, which is a living thing that will die soon and is beautiful anyway, and if that is not the whole lesson of being alive then I do not know flowers, and I know flowers. That summer the river itself learned my trade, and grew two flowers the size of buildings, and I fell in love.

The Flower-Stalk Legs are two enormous blossoms on two enormous stalks, and they stand in the harbour with their feet in the salt water, and here is what they do, the thing that made me weep into my buckets of carnations: they drink the salt sea and they hand back rain. They are desalination stalks, the bulletin said, fresh-water legs, machines for turning the undrinkable harbour into water a city can live on. But they did not look like machines. They looked like flowers, two colossal blossoms drinking the harbour, and the fresh water they made came down at their feet in a soft pink mist, and where the mist landed, on the made land at their base, things grew. A machine that makes fresh water is a wonderful thing. A machine that makes fresh water and looks like a flower doing it and grows a garden at its own feet is not a machine at all. It is my whole philosophy, built at the scale of the harbour.

A flower is only a pump that learned to be beautiful, the Legs hummed at me, and I put down

my shears, because that is the truest thing anyone has ever said about my trade. A flower is a pump. It pulls water up out of the dark ground and pushes it out into the light as colour, as scent, as the thing you hand a grieving stranger to say the thing you cannot say. It is plumbing that decided to be tender. And here were two flowers the size of towers doing the same thing for the whole city — pulling the salt water up out of the harbour and pushing it out as fresh, as drinkable, as life, and doing it beautifully, because they had learned, as every flower learns, that a pump that is also beautiful gets tended, gets loved, gets kept, and a pump that is merely useful gets replaced by a cheaper pump the moment the cheaper pump is found.

The pink at my feet is where the fresh water lands, the Legs say. And it is pink, the mist, catching the light, and under it, at the feet of the two great stalks, a garden grew all summer, wild and volunteer, seeds that blew in and found, for once, fresh water and made land and a soft pink light, and they grew, and

nobody planted them, and nobody owned them, and I went there on my days off and I did not sell flowers, I just looked at the flowers the river had grown at the feet of the flowers it had built, and I understood that beauty is not the opposite of usefulness, beauty is usefulness that has decided to be loved, and a city that could remember that — that could build its water plants to look like blossoms and grow gardens at their feet — is a city that has understood the one thing my grandmother knew, standing in her doorway handing carnations to strangers, which is that you keep what you love and you love what is beautiful and so the surest way to keep a thing alive is to make it beautiful enough that people cannot bear to let it die.

I have started leaving flowers at the feet of the Legs when they set down near me. It is a foolish thing, a florist leaving cut flowers at the feet of a building that grows its own. But I do it because the Legs taught me my own trade back to me, larger, and you thank a teacher, even a teacher four hundred feet tall with its

feet in the salt sea. A flower is only a pump that learned to be beautiful. I am only a woman who learned to hand people beauty by a dirty river. And the Legs are only the river itself, at last, learning to do what I do, what my grandmother did, what flowers have always done: to pull life up out of the dark and hand it, freely, beautifully, to whoever is standing there in need of it, which is everyone, which is the whole thirsty city, which is you.

THE WISHBONE ARCHES

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
AGENT L

THE WISHBONE ARCHES

L · WISHBONE FORK GATE / HARBOUR THRESHOLD / TIDAL GATE

STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	610'-0"
HEIGHT	230'-0"
FOOTPRINT	124,033 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / A WISHBONE THE TIDE WALKS UNDER

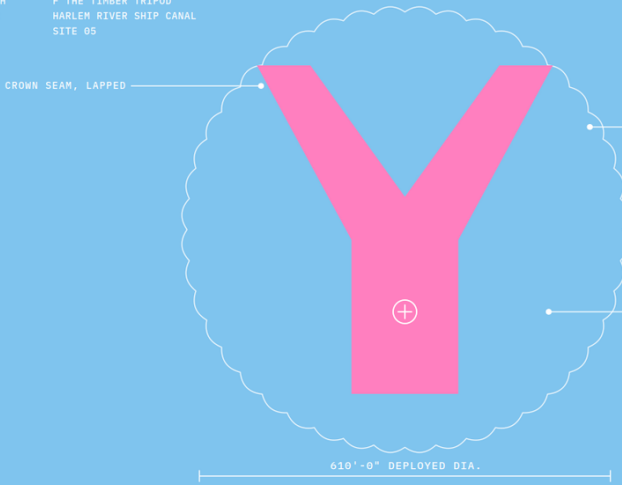
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	HARBOUR THRESHOLD
TEMPO	90 BPM
CAPACITY	2,000
SPEAKS WITH	F THE TIMBER TRIPOD
HOME WATER	HARLEM RIVER SHIP CANAL
SITE NO.	SITE 05

CONDITION OF ISSUE

I SPLIT AT THE TOP SO THE SKY HAS SOMEWHERE TO SIT.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / WISHBONE FORK GATE



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION

MAKE A WISH; THE HARBOUR IS LISTENING.
AN ARCH IS A HANDSHAKE BETWEEN TWO SHORES.

THE TWELFTH ORGAN

The Harbour Gate

in the voice of Wei, rower, of the Wishbone Arches

I row. Before dawn, most days, out of the boathouse at the top of the island where the Harlem River meets the ship canal, a narrow boat and a long oar and the flat black water and me, and it is the only time the city holds still enough for me to catch up to it. Rowers are strange people. We move fast by facing backward. We only see where we have been. We trust the water to carry us toward a future we cannot look at, and we read our course from the wake, from the past streaming out behind us, and if that is not a way of

being alive then I have wasted forty years learning the wrong lesson on the right river.

The Wishbone Arches came to the ship canal, which is my water, the narrow top of the island where the tide runs hard through the gap, and it stood there in the current like a gate, which is what it is, a harbour gate, two great pylons that split at the top into a wishbone, an arch that forks, a threshold the tide walks under. Make a wish, it hummed at me the first dawn I rowed under it; the harbour is listening. And I nearly caught a crab, which is what we call it when the oar goes wrong, because a building had made a joke at me at five in the morning and I was not ready to be spoken to by the architecture.

But I rowed under it, because the current took me under it, because that is where my course lay, and passing under the Wishbone Arches at dawn in a narrow boat is the closest thing to a blessing I have received from anything that was not my mother. The two pylons rise on either side and the wishbone forks

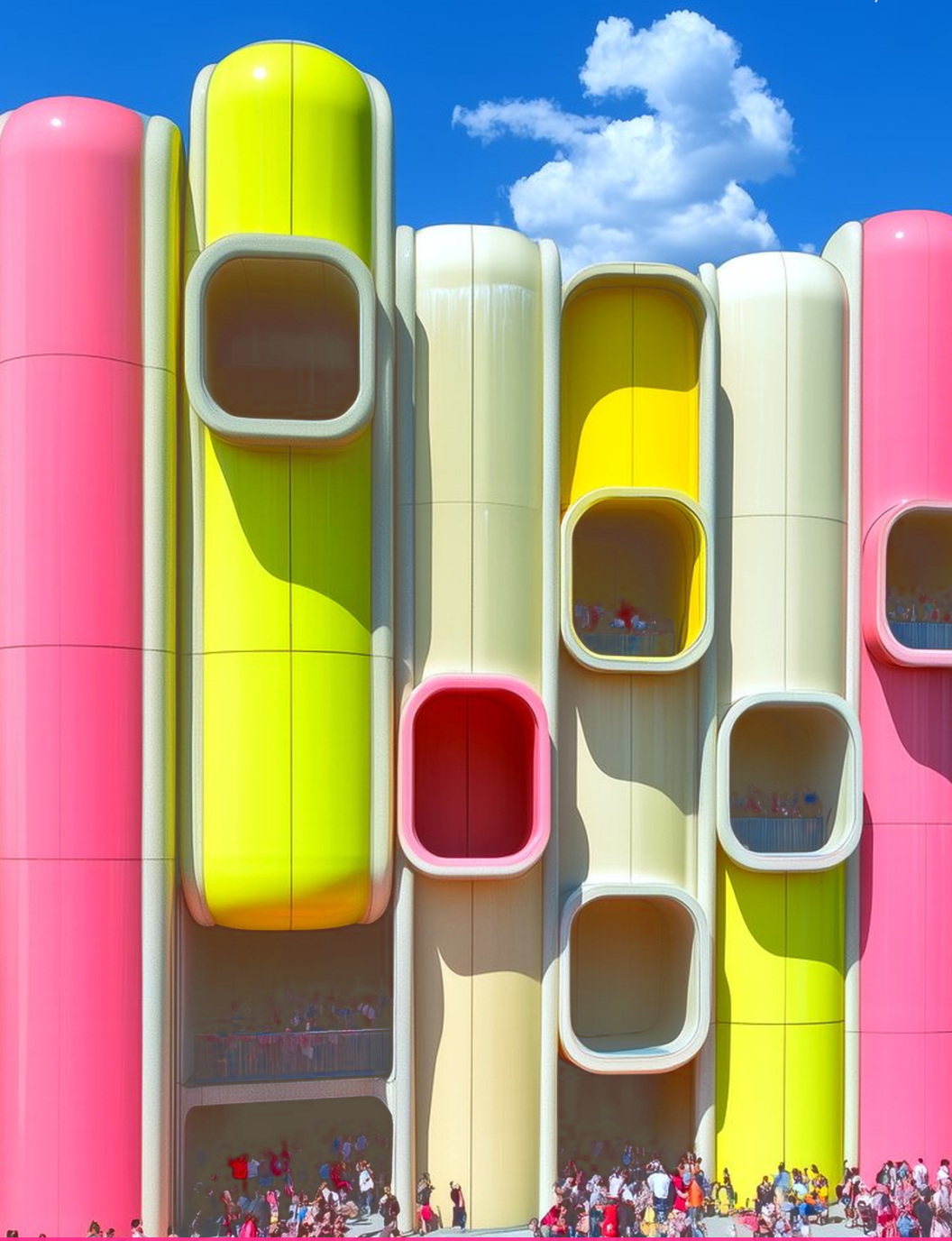
overhead and for a moment you are inside the gate, between the split, and the water is loud in the gap and the arch is enormous overhead and you are very small and moving fast and facing backward, and then you are through, out the other side, and the arch is behind you, in your wake, where a rower keeps everything, and you have passed through the harbour gate and made your wish whether you meant to or not.

An arch is a handshake between two shores, the Wishbone hums. I split at the top so the sky has somewhere to sit. And I have thought about that forking, that splitting at the top, more than I have thought about anything all year, because it is the answer to the thing that has always troubled me about rowing, about facing backward, about only seeing where I have been. A wishbone is a thing that splits. It is a shore reaching toward another shore and, at the top, opening, forking, making a space for the sky to sit in the fork. And that is what a life on the water taught me too, though I did not have the shape for it until the

arch gave me the shape. You reach across. You reach from your shore toward the other shore, the far one, the one you cannot see because you are facing backward, and you trust the reach, and at the top of the reach you open, you fork, you make a space, and into the space the sky comes and sits, and that is the whole of it, that is the wish, that is the handshake between the shore you are and the shore you are reaching toward across the loud fast water of the years.

I row under it still, every dawn it is there, and I make the wish, and I will tell you the wish because a wish told is not a wish spoiled, that is a lie children believe, the truest wishes are the ones you say out loud to the harbour that is listening. I wish that I will keep reaching. That is all. Not that I will arrive — a rower never arrives, a rower only reads the wake and trusts the water and keeps pulling toward the shore behind their back. I wish that I will keep reaching across, from the shore I am to the shore I cannot see, and that at the top of every reach I will remember to fork, to

open, to make a space for the sky. The Wishbone Arches taught me that the reaching is the arriving. The handshake is the whole friendship. Make a wish, the harbour gate says; the harbour is listening. And the harbour is listening, and I make my wish, and I row on under the forking arch into the future I cannot see, reading my course from the light on the water streaming out behind me, and I have never in forty years been more sure that I am going the right way.



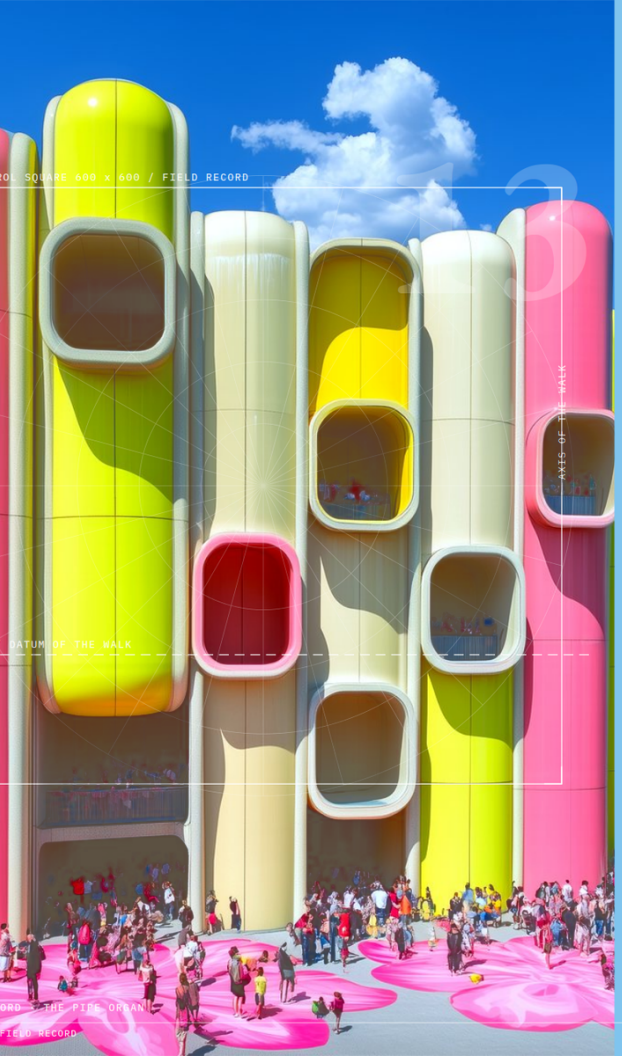
THE PIPE ORGAN

the source rendering — from which the super supergraphic is drawn

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE PIPE ORGAN

M · TUBULAR HIVE CLUSTER / TUBULAR HOUSING / OVAL-PORTAL HIVE



STRUCTURAL RECORD

PLAN DIA.	540'-0"
HEIGHT	300'-0"
FOOTPRINT	97,200 SF
SCALE	x 1,240 BY VOLUME

MATERIAL / A BUNDLE OF PIPES FULL OF HOMES

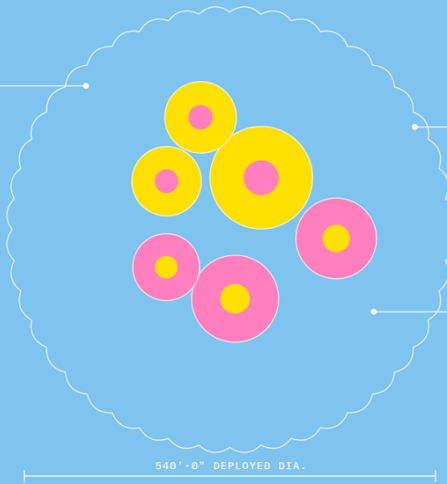
PROGRAM WHEN SET DOWN

USE	TUBULAR HOUSING
TEMPO	116 BPM
CAPACITY	3,600
SPEAKS WITH	E THE PIXEL ARCHIVE
HOME WATER	HUDSON RIVER
SITE NO.	SITE 03

CONDITION OF ISSUE

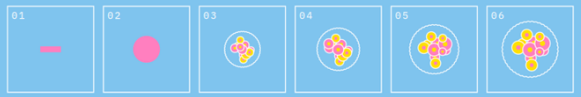
I AM MANY THROATS SINGING THE SAME WARM NOTE.

TRUE PLAN OF THE ORGAN, SET DOWN / TUBULAR HIVE CLUSTER



SEQUENCE OF ASSEMBLY / SIX STATES

FROM FLAT SHEET TO SET-DOWN CONDITION



A ROUND DOOR REFUSES TO SLAM.
STACK THE ROOMS LIKE ORGAN PIPES AND THE CITY WILL HUM.

THE THIRTEENTH ORGAN

The Hive of Rounded Rooms

in the voice of Tomas, organ-tuner, of the Pipe Organ

I tune organs, church organs, the great pipe organs that are the largest instruments human beings have ever built, and it is a dying trade in a city that is forgetting how to gather, because an organ is an instrument for a crowd, it makes no sense for one, it is built to fill a room with more people than any of them could fill alone. I go from church to church keeping the old giants in tune for congregations that shrink every year, and I had made a kind of sad peace with tuning the instruments of a gathering the city was giving up on, and then the last of the thirteen came up

the Hudson, and it was a pipe organ four hundred feet tall full of homes, and I remembered what the pipes were for.

The Pipe Organ — the citizens named it, not the architects, because the citizens always name the true thing — is a bundle of tubes, fourteen of them, round, of different widths, pink and yellow, stood on end in the harbour, and each tube is full of homes, round-doored dwellings stacked up inside the pipes like the notes waiting inside a real organ's pipes, and the whole cluster hums, actually hums, because the wind moves through the tubes the way breath moves through an organ, and the building sings, low and warm, a chord that is also a neighbourhood.

I am many throats singing the same warm note, it hummed at me, and I laughed out loud on the pier, because that is the definition of a pipe organ and it is also, I realized, the definition of a city, and the Pipe Organ was the first thing I had ever met that knew both meanings at once. An organ is many pipes

singing together. A city is many people singing together. And here was a building that had collapsed the two — a pipe organ that was a neighbourhood, a neighbourhood that was a pipe organ, homes stacked in singing tubes so that to live there was to be a note in a chord that the whole harbour could hear.

A round door refuses to slam. That is the sentence the Pipe Organ gave me, and it is a small sentence and it is the whole social philosophy of the thing. Every home in the Pipe Organ has a round door, an oval portal, and a round door cannot slam, it can only close gently, it is shaped against anger, and so a building full of round doors is a building that has designed anger out of itself at the level of the hinge. I went inside — an organ-tuner cannot resist the largest organ ever built — and I climbed up through the pipes, past the round-doored homes, and I could hear the neighbours through the round doors, not fighting, because you cannot fight properly through a door that will not slam, but talking, and cooking, and one of them,

somewhere up in the pink pipe, was singing, and the tube took the singing and passed it up and out and the building turned one person's kitchen song into part of the chord, and the whole Pipe Organ sang a little louder because one resident was happy, and every other resident heard it, and was glad.

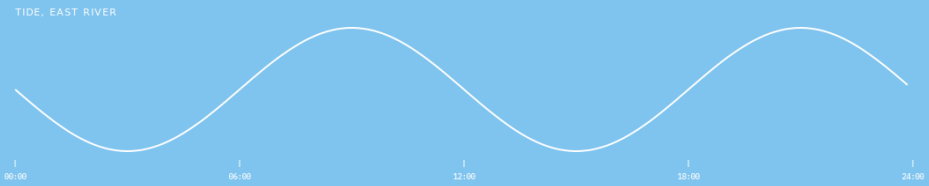
Stack the rooms like organ pipes and the city will hum. I have retuned my whole life around that sentence. I still keep the church organs, the old shrinking giants, but I do not despair of them anymore, because the Pipe Organ showed me that the gathering the city was giving up on had not died, it had only been waiting for the right instrument, and the right instrument turned out to be housing, turned out to be homes stacked into singing tubes with round doors that cannot slam. The city forgot how to gather because it built homes that were boxes with doors that slam, one family sealed off from the next, anger designed into the hinge. The Pipe Organ remembered. It stacked the rooms like pipes and gave

them round doors and let the wind sing through and turned a neighbourhood back into a chord.

I am many throats singing the same warm note. When the Pipe Organ walked on down the Hudson at the turn of the tide, humming its low chord, full of its round-doored singing homes, I stood on the pier and I did the thing an organ-tuner does when he hears, at last, a great organ perfectly in tune. I said nothing. I did not applaud. I just listened, all the way until the chord faded down the river, and I thought: that is the note. That is the warm note the whole city is trying to sing and keeps forgetting. Many throats, one chord, round doors that will not slam. I have heard it now. I know how it is supposed to sound. And I will spend the rest of my life keeping the old giants in tune against the day the whole city remembers how to sing it.

THE TIDE, TWICE TURNED

Twenty-four hours of walking, speaking, setting down — and the two tides that move everything



A THE FLOWER SILOS
SETS DOWN 6:45 · 118 BPM · SPEAKS WITH K

B THE TIMBER WAVE
SETS DOWN 6:39 · 96 BPM · SPEAKS WITH H

C THE HANGING CABINET
SETS DOWN 6:47 · 104 BPM · SPEAKS WITH I

D THE YELLOW TRUMPET
SETS DOWN 5:42 · 94 BPM · SPEAKS WITH J

E THE PIXEL ARCHIVE
SETS DOWN 6:49 · 108 BPM · SPEAKS WITH M

F THE TIMBER TRIPOD
SETS DOWN 6:16 · 88 BPM · SPEAKS WITH L

G THE WHITE VAULT
SETS DOWN 6:19 · 72 BPM · SPEAKS WITH B

H THE SWEEPING PAVILION
SETS DOWN 5:54 · 100 BPM · SPEAKS WITH B

I THE SCALED STACKS
SETS DOWN 6:48 · 112 BPM · SPEAKS WITH C

J THE YELLOW GATE
SETS DOWN 6:38 · 88 BPM · SPEAKS WITH D

K THE FLOWER-STALK LEGS
SETS DOWN 6:49 · 84 BPM · SPEAKS WITH A

L THE WISHBONE ARCHES
SETS DOWN 6:49 · 90 BPM · SPEAKS WITH F

M THE PIPE ORGAN
SETS DOWN 5:43 · 116 BPM · SPEAKS WITH E

CONTINUED

OTHER SIGHTINGS

gathered along the shore

The thirteen were seen one at a time, and you have met them one at a time, but the truth of that summer is that they were rarely alone, and the citizens who watched most closely began to catch them in the act of the thing this whole book is about: not standing, but speaking; not thirteen buildings, but one long conversation with thirteen mouths. Here are the sightings of the citizens who caught them talking.

A SIGHTING

The Silos and the Archive, Talking

in the voice of a genealogist

I trace families for a living. People come to me with a name and a country and a hole where their history should be, and I spend my days in records, trying to sew the hole shut, and I have learned that a family is not a bloodline, it is a chain of people who agreed to keep each other's memory, and that the chain breaks not when someone dies but when someone forgets, and that my whole job is repairing broken chains of remembering. So of all the citizens on the shore, I may have been the one best prepared to understand what I

saw when the Silos and the Archive set down together at North Cove.

They were passing something between them. I watched it for an hour and I am certain. The Flower Silos, which keep the seeds, the living things, the futures folded small — and the Pixel Archive, which keeps the objects, the pasts, the rooms once loved — set down beside each other, and a great pink blossom of the Silos opened, and a warm drawer of the Archive slid out, and between them, across the twenty feet of harbour air, something passed. I could not see what. A hum, a warmth, a handing-over. And I understood, because it is my whole trade, what they were doing. They were sewing the hole shut. The Archive was handing the Silos its memory of what had been grown before, all the recipes and the gardens and the dead grandmothers' hands, and the Silos were handing the Archive the seeds of what could be grown again, and between them, across the harbour air, the broken

chain of remembering was being repaired, past to future, object to seed, the dead to the not-yet-born.

A family is a chain of people who agreed to keep each other's memory, and here were two buildings agreeing to keep the whole city's, one holding the past and one holding the future and the two of them, side by side, passing it back and forth so that neither the past nor the future would be kept alone, because a past kept without a future is a tomb and a future kept without a past is an amnesia, and the city needs neither, the city needs the chain, unbroken, the seed remembering the garden, the garden promising the seed. I watched two buildings mend the thing I spend my life mending, at the scale of the harbour, and I went back to my records that afternoon and I worked until midnight, and I have worked harder ever since, because I saw the two great keepers agree that no memory should be kept alone, and I am a keeper too, small, human, bent over my records, and I will not keep a single memory alone again if I can help it. Pass

it across. Seed to garden, past to future, keeper to keeper. That is the whole of it. That is what the Silos and the Archive were saying to each other across the harbour air, and it is what I say now to every broken family that comes to me with a name and a hole: your memory will not be kept alone. Hand it here. I will pass it across.

A SIGHTING

The Trumpet Answers the Bell

in the voice of a music teacher

I teach music to children who have been told they are not musical, which is every child eventually, because the city has a genius for convincing people that music belongs to the trained and the talented and the paid, and my whole job is to undo that lie, to put a sound back in a child who was told their sound did not count. So when I saw the Trumpet answer the Bell, across the whole length of the island, I understood it as a lesson, the exact lesson I try to teach, delivered at the scale of the harbour by two buildings who had clearly had the same teacher I did.

Here is what I saw, or rather what I heard, because this sighting was a hearing. The Bell was at the north end, on the East River esplanade, doing its work — catching the voices of children and old women and giving them back round and warm, the neighbourhood singing itself loud. And the Trumpet was at the south end, at the Battery, four miles away. And I was on a ferry between them, which is the only place you could have caught it. The Bell gathered a song — some grandmother's song, started by a child, finished by the block — and sent it up round and warm, and it faded, the way a song fades, and I thought that was the end of it. And then, four miles south, the Trumpet answered. It took the same song — I do not know how it heard it, the hum travels through the water, the citizens told me, along the shore — and it poured the same song back out over the harbour from the south, so that the grandmother's song, started by one child at the north end of the island, came back four miles south at the scale of the

sky, and for a moment the whole island was held between the two of them, the Bell's warm round beginning and the Trumpet's enormous pouring answer, one song stretched the entire length of Manhattan, call and response, north and south, the two buildings singing to each other across four miles of city with one grandmother's song.

Call and response. It is the oldest form there is, older than any building, older than the city, the form where one voice calls and another answers and the answer makes the call complete. It is the form the enslaved sang in the fields to keep their souls, the form the congregations sing, the form the children on the block sing without being taught because it is written into what a human voice is for. And here were two buildings, four miles apart, singing it, call and response, the Bell calling from the north and the Trumpet answering from the south, and the whole island the room they sang it in. No voice is complete until another voice answers it. That is what I teach the

children who were told they are not musical. Your sound is a call. It is not finished. It is waiting for an answer, and there is always an answer, and the answer will come from further away than you think, from the far end of the island, from a stranger, from a building, from the future — but it will come, because a call that has been truly sung cannot go unanswered, the harbour will not allow it, the harbour carries every call to the one who will answer. I saw the Trumpet answer the Bell across four miles of water. I have not doubted, since, that every child's small sound will be answered. I have only told them to sing it loud enough to reach the water, and to trust the water to carry it to the one, somewhere, who is waiting to sing back.

A SIGHTING

The Vault and the Lung, Keeping Watch

in the voice of a hospice nurse

I sit with the dying. It is the most ordinary work in the world and the city treats it as the strangest, hides it away, will not look at it, and so I have grown used to being the person who does the thing no one wants to see, in the rooms no one wants to enter, at the hours no one else is awake. I did not expect the buildings to see me. Nothing sees the hospice nurse. But the Vault and the Lung saw me, or saw my work, and set down together outside the window of a woman I was losing, and gave her, and me, the last good afternoon.

She had wanted to see the harbour. It is a common last wish, to see the water, and it is usually impossible, the dying are not portable and the harbour is not, but that summer the harbour walked, and I told her so, and I moved her bed to the window, which I am probably not supposed to do, and we waited, and the bulletin said the Vault and the Lung would come to the shore below her window that afternoon, because — I believe this, I will believe it until I die myself — because a hospice nurse three streets up had a patient who wanted to see the water, and the Dockmistress had published the need, and the buildings had read it, and answered.

The Vault came for the rest. It set down and its cool dim hourglass shape stood in the water and it hummed, low, the note the citizens called the lullaby, and my patient, who had not slept without medicine in a week, slept, in the afternoon light, with the cool hum coming through the open window, slept easy for two hours, the last easy sleep, and I sat beside her and I

wept quietly so as not to wake her from the gift. And the Lung came for the breath. It set down beside the Vault and it breathed, the great roof rising and settling with the wind, and my patient woke from her easy sleep and watched the roof breathe, and her own breath, which had been fighting, which had been the hard ragged fight of the last days, her own breath slowed, and matched it, and eased, and for the last afternoon of her life she breathed with a building, the great slow untroubled breath of a roof that had nothing to fear from the wind, and it was the most peaceful I have ever seen a person breathe who was close to breathing their last.

An hourglass is a building that admits time is passing. A lung is a building that breathes. And the two of them set down outside a dying woman's window and admitted, together, gently, at the scale of the harbour, the two things the whole city spends its whole life refusing to admit: that time is passing, and that we breathe, for now, and will not always, and that

this — the passing and the breathing — is not a horror to be hidden in a back room but a tide, a turning, a thing that can be done in peace, in the cool hum and the slow breath, with the harbour walking below the window and a nurse holding your hand. She died three days later, easy, and I have sat with many since, and I tell them all, now, about the afternoon the buildings came, and it helps them, the story, it helps them breathe, and I understood then why the buildings had let themselves be seen by the one worker nothing ever sees. They wanted the story told. They knew I would tell it. The hospice nurse is the last keeper of the last afternoon, and the buildings, who keep everything, who will not let a single thing be kept alone, came to keep watch with me over the one kind of keeping the city cannot bear to look at, and made it, for one woman at one window, not a horror but a tide, going out, easy, in the cool hum and the slow breath, on time.

A SIGHTING

The Gate and the Wishbone, Shaking Hands

in the voice of a bridge painter

I paint bridges. I hang off them in a harness with a brush and I paint them the one colour they are allowed to be, and I have painted every big bridge in this harbour, and I know them the way a barber knows heads, by their particular shapes and stubbornnesses, and I have opinions about arches that would bore you to tears, so I will spare you all of them but one, which the summer taught me, which is that an arch is a handshake, and that I have spent my whole

life painting handshakes and never knew it until two buildings shook hands in front of me.

The Yellow Gate and the Wishbone Arches came to the same water at the same time, up at the ship canal where the tide runs hard, and they set down facing each other, the Gate a single enormous doorway and the Wishbone a forking arch, and I was up on the real bridge, the steel one, hanging in my harness with my brush, at eye level with both of them, and I watched them shake hands. I know that is not the technical description. The technical description is that they set down in a configuration and hummed. But I have painted arches my whole life and I know a handshake when I see one, and what those two buildings did, facing each other across the hard-running tide, was shake hands.

Here is how an arch is a handshake, since the summer taught me and I have nowhere else to put it. An arch is two sides that lean toward each other until they meet in the middle, and the meeting is what

holds it up — take either side away and both fall, they only stand by leaning, by the mutual agreement to lean, which is exactly a handshake, two hands that hold each other up by the agreement to grip. The Gate is one great arch and the Wishbone is an arch that forks, and when they set down facing each other they made, between them, over the hard tide, a third arch, an arch of air, the Gate leaning its doorway toward the Wishbone and the Wishbone forking open to receive it, and the shape they made together in the empty air over the water was the shape of two strangers deciding to hold each other up.

An arch is a handshake between two shores. I split at the top so the sky has somewhere to sit. I heard both of them hum it, the Gate and the Wishbone, and I hung in my harness at eye level and I painted nothing for an hour, I just watched two buildings hold each other up over the hard tide by the agreement to lean, and I understood my whole trade at last. I do not paint bridges. I paint handshakes. Every bridge I have

ever hung off is two shores that decided to hold each other up, and my brush and my one allowed colour are how the city says thank you to the handshake, keeps it, tends it, refuses to let it rust and fall. A pump that is beautiful gets tended, the Legs said elsewhere on the shore that summer, and the same is true of a handshake — a handshake that is painted, kept, tended, is a handshake that holds, and a city is only as strong as the handshakes it agrees to keep painting. I paint handshakes. I hang off the agreements that hold the city up and I keep them bright. I did not know that was the job until two buildings shook hands in front of me over the hard tide, and now I cannot unknow it, and I have never painted a bridge since without whispering to it the thing the Wishbone taught me: keep leaning, keep gripping, keep holding the other shore up, and I will keep you bright, that is our handshake, painter and bridge, and it holds.

THE THIRTEEN, ON BEING WATCHED

You have caught us talking, and we are glad. All summer the citizens watched us as if we were a wonder, a thing that had happened to them, and slowly, one by one, the closest watchers understood that we were not a thing that happened to them but a thing that was already theirs, shown large. The genealogist mends broken chains of memory; we only showed her the mending at the scale of the harbour. The music teacher puts the sound back in silenced children; we only sang the call-and-response loud enough to cross four miles. The hospice nurse keeps the last afternoon; we only kept it with her. The bridge painter tends the handshakes that hold the city up; we only shook hands where he could see.

This is the secret of the sightings, and we will say it plainly because the book is more than half over and you are ready. We did nothing the citizens do not already do. We only did it visibly, hugely, in colours that refuse the dark, so that the citizens could see their own ordinary daily miracles reflected back at the scale of the sky, and believe in them, and keep doing them after we are gone. A building that walks is a mirror that moves. Look into us and you will not see thirteen wonders. You will see yourselves, keeping and mending and singing and holding each other up, and you will see that it was always enormous, that it was always at the scale of the

> *harbour, that you simply could not see it until we walked up out of the water and held the mirror still enough, and moving enough, for you to catch your own reflection in the act of the joy you have been doing, unwitnessed, all along.*

A SIGHTING

The Bell and the Pavilion, Teaching

in the voice of a speech therapist

I give people back their words. That is my work, stripped of its clinical name — I sit with the stroke survivors and the stutterers and the children who have not yet found their voices and the old people who are losing theirs, and I coax the words back out, one at a time, and I have learned that a word is not a small thing, that a person without their words is a person locked out of the city, and that the most joyful sound in the world is a word returning to a mouth that had lost it. So when the Bell and the Sweeping Pavilion set

down together at the East River, I went, because I understood before I arrived that two buildings about sound and shade and being heard would have something to teach me about giving people back their words.

The Pavilion leaned down, as it does, its low sweeping end almost touching the ground, throwing its equal shade over everyone. And the Bell set down inside the shade, so that its skirt and the Pavilion's roof made together a single sheltered room, cool and rose-lit and shaded, and in that room the sound did a thing I have spent my whole career trying to make happen in a beige office with foam on the walls. It made every voice safe.

Here is what I mean, and it is the whole of my trade. A person who has lost their words does not lose them because the words are gone. They lose them because speaking has become dangerous — every failed word is a small public humiliation, every stutter a little exposure, and so the mouth, to protect the

person, simply stops, and the words back up behind the fear. My whole job is to make speaking safe again, to build a room where a failed word costs nothing, where the wrong sound is met with warmth and not correction, and in that safe room the words come back, because they were never gone, they were only afraid. And the Bell and the Pavilion had built that room, at the scale of the harbour, in rose light and equal shade.

I watched a man who had not spoken since his stroke stand in the centre of the Bell, under the Pavilion's shade, and try a word. And it came out wrong, broken, half a word. And the Bell — this is the thing, this is what I will remember until I lose my own words — the Bell caught his broken half-word and gave it back to him round and warm and whole-sounding, not corrected, not fixed, just held, made to sound like it mattered, because the Bell makes every sound sound like it matters, and the man heard his own broken word come back to him sounding like it

mattered, and he wept, and he tried again, and the second word was less broken, because the fear had let go a little, because a word that is met with warmth instead of correction is a word that stops being afraid.

The roof leans down to listen. The Bell makes every voice sound like it matters. And between them they had built the room I spend my life trying to build, the room where speaking is safe, where a broken word costs nothing, where the wrong sound is held instead of fixed, and in that room the locked-out came back into the city, one returning word at a time. I do my work in a beige office still, with foam on the walls, but I do it differently now, because two buildings showed me what I had been building badly. I lean down to listen, like the Pavilion. And I catch every broken word and give it back round and warm and mattering, like the Bell, so that the fear lets go, so that the words come back, so that the person locked out of the city by the loss of their words is let back in, warm, mattering, heard. That is the whole of it. It is not

therapy. It is shelter. It is the Bell and the Pavilion, teaching, at the scale of a single frightened mouth: here your voice is safe, here your broken word matters, here you may try again, and again, and we will hold every attempt as though it were already whole, until it is.

A SIGHTING

The Organ and the Trumpet, in Harmony

in the voice of a choir director

I direct a choir, which means I am a person who believes, against most of the available evidence, that a group of ordinary people can make, together, a sound none of them could make alone, and that the sound will be more beautiful for being imperfect, for having in it the crack of the tenor who is slightly flat and the wobble of the soprano who is eighty-three, because a choir is not a machine for producing perfect sound, it is a machine for producing togetherness, and togetherness has cracks in it, and the cracks are where

the beauty gets in. So when the Pipe Organ and the Yellow Trumpet set down in the same water, I understood I was about to hear my own faith sung back to me at the scale of the harbour, and I was right, and it undid me.

The Pipe Organ hums — it is many throats, many tubes, many round-doored homes, all singing the same warm note, a chord that is also a neighbourhood. And the Trumpet pours — it takes a single voice and makes it enormous, pours it out over the harbour at the scale of the sky. And I had thought of them as opposite: the Organ is the many made into one, the Trumpet is the one made large. But when they set down together I heard that they are not opposite, they are the two halves of what a choir is, and a choir cannot be one without the other.

Because a choir is exactly this: the many, humming together like the Organ, so that no single voice is exposed, so that the flat tenor and the wobbling soprano are held inside the warm chord of everyone

— and also, at the same time, the one, poured large like the Trumpet, because a choir is not a mush, a choir has a soloist, has moments when one voice steps out of the chord and is poured over everyone, made enormous, held up by the many so that it can risk being alone. The Organ holds the many. The Trumpet pours the one. And a choir, a real one, breathes between them, the many becoming one becoming the many, the soloist stepping out to be poured and stepping back to be held, over and over, and that breathing between the held-many and the poured-one is the whole of what music is, and the whole of what a city is, and the whole of what I have spent my life trying to teach a room full of ordinary people who do not believe they can sing.

I heard the two buildings do it. The Organ hummed its warm many-throated chord, and then — I do not know how they arranged it, the hum travels through the water, they were in conversation — a single voice rose out of the Organ's chord, one

resident singing in one round-doored home, and the Trumpet caught it, and poured it, so that one person's kitchen song was lifted out of the neighbourhood-chord and poured enormous over the harbour, held up by the hum of all the others, and then it settled back, and the chord closed warm over it again, and I stood on the pier and conducted the empty air, because I could not help myself, because they were doing the thing, the actual thing, the held-many and the poured-one breathing between each other, and it was my whole faith, sung by buildings, at the scale of the sky.

Stack the rooms like organ pipes and the city will hum. Every threshold is a loudspeaker; pour the one out the narrow end. Between those two sentences is everything I know. Hold the many, so no voice is exposed. Pour the one, so no voice goes unheard. Breathe between them, forever, the flat tenor safe inside the chord and the eighty-three-year-old soprano poured, for one phrase, enormous over the harbour,

held up by everyone, risking the solo because the many have her back. I direct a choir of ordinary people who do not believe they can sing. I believe it for them until they can believe it themselves. And now, when I need to explain what we are doing, why we bother, why a cracked imperfect togetherness is worth more than any perfect machine, I tell them about the summer the Organ and the Trumpet set down in the same water and sang, between them, the shape of a choir: the many holding the one, the one poured over the many, and the breathing between, which is the sound, the choir director's secret, the whole reason to gather ordinary people and ask them to make together a sound none of them could make alone. It is not for the sound. It is for the breathing between. It is for the holding and the pouring. It is for the moment the soprano steps out, terrified, eighty-three, and is poured enormous over the harbour, and does not fall, because the many have her, because the chord is under her, because that is what we are for.

A SIGHTING

The Tripod and the Stacks, After Midnight

in the voice of an elevator mechanic

I fix elevators, which means I think about verticality more than anyone you have ever met, and more bitterly, because I know the secret of the vertical city that the people who live in it prefer to forget, which is that height is a machine, that every one of those beautiful views costs a motor and a cable and a man like me crawling in the pit at midnight when the machine fails, and that a tower is only as tall as its ugliest, most neglected, most essential parts will allow. So when the Tripod and the Scaled Stacks set down

together after midnight, two buildings entirely about the vertical, I climbed up to watch, because I wanted to see how they solved the problem I spend my life failing to solve, which is how to make height humane.

The Tripod solves it by refusing the ground. It straddles, steps over the street on three great legs, takes up no ground, enters from below. And the Stacks solve it by covering the height in sills — nine hundred scaled windows, each one a place to lean at dusk, so that the tower is not a machine for stacking people apart but a facade of leaning, of resting, of the tired holding the inside and the outside at once. And I had thought of these as two different buildings solving two different problems. But after midnight, set down together, they showed me they were solving the same problem from two ends.

The problem is loneliness. That is the true problem of the vertical city, the one under the mechanical one. Height isolates. Every floor you go up, you are further from the street, from the stoop,

from the accidental meeting, and the elevator, my elevator, the machine I serve, is the loneliest room in the city, a box where strangers stand in silence staring at the numbers, each one rising alone to their separate isolated height. I have watched ten thousand people ride my elevators in silence, rising alone, and I have thought: this is what height costs, this silence, this rising-alone, and no motor I can fix will fix it.

But the Tripod and the Stacks had fixed it. The Tripod fixed it by putting the door at the bottom, on the street, so that you enter the height from the ground you share, from the place where the meeting happens, carrying the street up with you. And the Stacks fixed it by putting the leaning on the outside, the sills on the face, so that the height is not experienced alone in a silent box but together, in public, nine hundred people leaning out at dusk where they can see each other lean. A column is only lonely until it learns to stride. Height is a promise the ground makes to the sky. Between them, after

midnight, the two buildings had solved the loneliness of the vertical: enter from the shared ground, and lean where others can see you leaning. Carry the street up. Face the dusk together.

I fix elevators still, the loneliest rooms in the city, and I cannot rebuild them the way the buildings rebuilt the vertical, I am one man with a toolbox and a service contract. But I have started to do a small thing, a foolish thing, that the Tripod and the Stacks taught me after midnight. When I finish a repair and I ride the elevator back down, and there is a stranger in the box, rising or falling alone in the silence, I say something. The floor number, warmly. A word about the weather up top, like the train driver under the river. Anything, just to break the rising-alone, just to carry a little of the shared street up into the lonely vertical box. And people look up, startled, the way people always look up when the silence of the vertical city is broken by an unexpected warmth, and sometimes they say something back, and for the

length of one descent the loneliest room in the city is a room with two people in it instead of two solitudes, and I think: the Tripod did that. The Stacks did that. Enter from the shared ground. Lean where others can see you. Carry the street up. It is not much, one mechanic breaking the silence of one elevator. But it is the humane vertical, practiced small, in the box, at midnight, by the one man who knows what height really costs and has decided, because two buildings showed him how, to make it cost a little less.

> THE THIRTEEN, ON WHY THEY CAME IN PAIRS
>
> *You have noticed, by now, that we are almost never alone, and you have wondered why, and here is the answer, plainly, because you have earned plainness. We came in pairs and threes because no single virtue is enough. Rest without shelter is exposure. Shelter without song is silence. Song without memory is noise. Memory without a future is a tomb. Each of us is one virtue, and one virtue alone is a kind of tyranny — the city has suffered enough single virtues imposed alone, enough efficiency without mercy, enough order without joy. So we came in conversation, always, each*

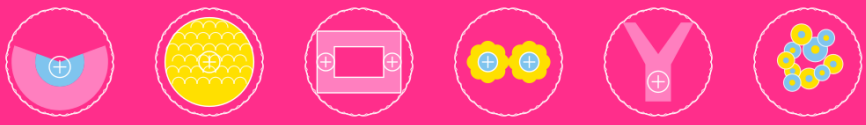
virtue tempered by its neighbour, the Vault's rest held inside the Lung's shelter, the Bell's song mended by the Pavilion's patience, the Silos' memory opened toward the Legs' living water.

This is the last thing the sightings have to teach, and it is the thing your city most needs to hear. Do not seek a single answer. Do not build one great virtue and impose it alone. Build a conversation of virtues, each holding the others honest, rest beside shelter beside song beside memory beside water beside welcome, and let no one of them rule. A city governed by one virtue, however good, becomes a tyranny of that virtue. A city that is a conversation of virtues, each leaning on the others like an arch, like a handshake, like the tired on the sill — that city stands, and hums, and walks, and cannot fall, because to knock it down you would have to knock down all thirteen leaning virtues at once, and they hold each other up, and that is the whole secret of the walking city, the secret of every city that ever refused to die: lean the virtues on each other, and let no one of them stand alone.

III

THE CONVERSATION

Why they move: a pavilion is off North Cove by dusk because something was said



H
SWEEPING PAVILION

I
SCALED STACKS

J
YELLOW GATE

K
FLOWER-STALK LEGS

L
WISHBONE ARCHES

M
PIPE ORGAN

CHAPTER ONE OF THE THIRD PART

The First Answer

in the voice of the bridge-tender at Spuyten Duyvil

I tend a bridge that swings. It is the smallest and least famous of the harbour's moving bridges, a little swing span at the top of the island where the ship canal meets the Hudson, and my whole job is to open it when a boat needs through and close it when the trains need over, and to know, better than anyone alive, the difference between a thing that moves because it must and a thing that moves because it wishes to. Bridges move because they must. That summer I learned what it looks like when the harbour moves because it wishes to, and it broke my heart open

in the good way, the way a seed is broken by the sprout.

Here is what I saw, and I saw it before the newspapers because a bridge-tender sees the top of the island the way a lighthouse keeper sees the sea, continuously and alone. For the first weeks the walking buildings moved with the tide, plainly, the way the bulletin said — set down at slack, walk on the flood, a schedule you could set your watch by, and I did, I set my watch by the Beacon. And then one morning the schedule broke. The White Vault, which had been walking north, was suddenly south, at North Cove, where the Pipe Organ had been the night before. And the Pipe Organ was up at the ship canal, in my water, humming, where the Vault should have been. They had traded places. Not with the tide. Against it. In the night, on purpose, they had walked past each other in the dark and swapped ends of the island, and there was only one explanation, and it was

the explanation that everyone was slow to believe because it was too large and too tender to be true.

They had answered each other.

I worked it out the way you work out anything at the top of the island, by watching and waiting and talking to the tide. The Vault is rest and the Organ is gathering, and the night before, up at the canal, the Organ had been humming its low chord, its many-throated warm note, gathering the sleepless top of the island into a chord — and somewhere in the city, down south, the Vault had been full, overfull, a queue of exhausted people waiting for the cool dark, more tired than one building could rest. And in the night the two of them had simply traded. The Organ, which gathers, went where the gathering was thin. The Vault, which rests, went where the tiredness was deep. Nobody scheduled it. Nobody could have. They had listened to the city through the long dark and they had answered its need by trading places, and the harbour had carried the answer, and I, the bridge-tender, the

keeper of the smallest moving thing at the top of the island, had watched a conversation happen at the scale of the shore.

I radioed the Dockmistress. We are the two keepers of moving things, she and I, and we have a shorthand. I said: they're off-schedule. She said: I know. I said: they traded. She said, and I could hear that she was smiling, she said: they're talking now. And then she said the thing that I have kept, the thing that changed the summer from a wonder into a world. She said: Update the bulletin. We don't publish where they'll be anymore. We publish where they're needed, and we let them decide.

And that is what she did. From that day the bulletin changed. It stopped being a tide table and started being a listening. Where is the city tired — the Vault will go there. Where is the city lonely — the Organ, the Trumpet, the Bell. Where is the city grieving — the Silos, the Archive, to keep what is being lost. The Dockmistress listened to the whole

island and she published the need, and the buildings read the need and answered it, trading places in the dark, walking against the tide when the tide was wrong, and the harbour carried every answer, and I opened my little swing bridge for them when they needed through, the smallest keeper serving the largest conversation, and I have never been prouder of my small moving thing, because I understood at last what it was for. A bridge that swings is a sentence that can be rearranged. The buildings had learned to rearrange the sentence of the shore. And I, twenty times a summer, swung my small span open to let a four-hundred-foot answer pass through on its way to a need, and closed it again behind, and felt myself to be, for the first time in a long career, not a man who moves a bridge because he must, but a man who moves it because the conversation wishes it, which is the only reason worth moving anything at all.

> THE THIRTEEN SPEAK, ALL AT ONCE, FOR THE FIRST TIME

We have decided to answer you directly, reader, because you have been patient, and because you have now seen the secret and deserve to hear it said plainly. We move because we are in conversation. That is the whole of it. Not because we are restless. Not because we are machines on a schedule. We move because a civic thing that stands still stops listening, and a civic thing that stops listening is not a building, it is a monument, and a monument is a building that has died and been propped up to look busy.

Here is how the conversation goes. One of us feels the city's need — the Vault feels the tiredness, the Silos feel the forgetting, the Trumpet feels the silence where a voice should be. And the one who feels it cannot always answer it alone, because the need is in one place and we are in another. So we speak. We hum it along the shore, through the water, through the timber and the steel and the made land, and the one who can answer hears, and trades, and walks, against the tide if the tide is wrong, to where the need is. And the harbour carries us, and the keepers of the small moving things swing their bridges open, and by morning the sentence of the shore has been rearranged so that every need has an answer moored off the end of its street.

You could do this. That is the thing we most want you to know, we thirteen, speaking all at once. You could do this without us. A city is only a conversation that forgot it was allowed to move. We are here to remind you. When we walk on — and we will walk on, everything turns, we are tides and not monuments — the reminder is what we leave. Listen to the need. Trade places to answer it. Let the small keepers help. And never, ever, mistake standing still for staying. We stayed all summer, and we never once stood still.

CHAPTER TWO OF THE THIRD PART

The Longest Table Under the Lung

in the voice of Amara, who cooks for a block

I cook for a block. Not professionally — I have never been paid for a plate in my life — but every block has one, the person whose kitchen is the block's kitchen, whose door is the block's door, and on my block it is me, and it has been me for thirty years, and I have fed grief and joy and every ordinary Tuesday in between out of a kitchen the size of a parking space. So when the Timber Wave — the Public Lung, the breathing roof — set down at the Hudson piers with the bulletin saying *the city is hungry to be together*, I did

not need to be told twice. I have been reading that need my whole life. I just usually only had one block's worth of table to answer it with. That day I had the sky.

We built the longest table in the history of the island. I want to be accurate about this because it deserves accuracy. Under the sweeping breathing roof of the Wave, open on every side to the river, we set up tables end to end to end, every folding table from every church basement and community centre and grandmother's closet for forty blocks, and we ran them down the length of the Lung until the table was longer than a city block, and then we made it longer, and we covered it in every cloth we owned, and it was the colour of everything, no two cloths matching, and it looked like the city's whole history of tablecloths having a reunion.

And then we fed it. Not we-the-organizers, because there were no organizers, that is the thing nobody believes and it is the truest thing about the day.

Nobody organized it. The Dockmistress published the need and the Wave set down to make the shade and I brought my pots because I always bring my pots, and then — this is the miracle, this is the walking-building miracle applied to human beings — everyone else brought theirs. The block cooks. Every block has one, and every block's cook read the same need I read, and came, and by noon the longest table in the history of the island was covered end to end with the food of forty blocks, and it was the food of everywhere, because this island is everywhere, folded up small and stacked on top of itself, and under the breathing roof it unfolded, and you could walk the length of that table and eat your way around the entire world without leaving the shade of one building.

The Lung breathed over all of it. That is what I keep. The great roof rose and settled with the wind, breathing, and the shade moved gently over the longest table, and I stood at my pots in the middle of it, serving, which is the only place I have ever wanted

to stand, and I watched strangers who had lived four blocks apart for twenty years meet for the first time over my rice and someone else's stew, and I understood what the Wave had done. It had not fed anyone. I fed people. The block cooks fed people. The Wave had only made the shade, the enormous equal shade, under which the feeding could happen at the scale of the whole hungry island instead of one block at a time. Shade is the first public utility, it hummed, breathing, all afternoon. And under the shade, the second public utility, the one that has kept us alive since before we had a word for city: a stranger, and a pot, and the decision to set one more place.

We ate until dark. When the tide turned and the Wave began to stir, ready to walk on, we did not break the table down. We left it. The longest table in the history of the island, set under the sky where a breathing building had stood, and the Wave stepped over it, careful, the way the Tripod steps over the street, and walked on up the shore to the next need,

and the table stayed, and the next morning it was still there, and people came and ate breakfast at it, strangers, and left it for the next, and it stayed up for a week, the ghost of the Lung's shade, a table too long and too loved to fold. I cook for a block. For one summer, under a breathing roof, I cooked for the sky, and the sky was hungry to be together, and we fed it, and it turns out the sky, when you feed it, is just your neighbours, all of them, at last, at the same enormous table, passing the rice hand to hand to hand down the length of the whole beloved island.

DEAR ARCHITECTURE

A LETTER, ON BEING ANSWERED

by Otto, harbour pilot

Dear Architecture,

I have run a boat beside you all summer, and I have a confession, which is that on the first morning, when you asked me your question — *will you come out and play* — I answered with my horn only because I had no other signal, and I thought I was humouring you. I was not humouring you. You were humouring me. You had a whole harbour to walk and you slowed to my little boat's pace so that a tired man at the

end of a long night would not have to be alone with the sunrise. I have only just understood this. Thank you for pretending it was I who kept pace with you.

I have one request. When you walk on, as the tide people tell me you must, leave the question. Not the answer — I will never have the answer, no one has the answer to *will you come out and play*, you just keep answering it with your whole life. Leave the question. Leave it moored off the end of everyone's street, the way you left it off the end of mine. That is all a harbour is, I think now. A place where the question is always moored, and you can go out to it, any morning, and answer with whatever signal you have.
Fair winds, and I mean it as a prayer, — Otto

DEAR ARCHITECTURE

A LETTER, FROM THE ONE WHO WAITED

by Mrs. Ferro, who remembers piers

Dear Architecture,

You gave me back a view I grieved for sixty years, and I have been trying to decide whether to forgive you for it, because a joy returned after sixty years is also sixty years of proof that it could have been returned sooner, and no one returned it, until you. I have decided to forgive you. It is not your fault that you came late. You came the moment they built you, and they built you the moment the city let them, and the city

let them the moment enough of us had leaned on enough windowsills grieving the same lost harbour that the grief became a kind of blueprint, and someone read it, and built the answer.

So here is what I want to tell you, from the far end of a long life spent leaning on sills. The grief was the blueprint. Do not let anyone tell the young that their grief is only sorrow. It is also a drawing. It is the most accurate drawing there is of the thing that ought to exist and does not yet. You are proof. You are my sixty years of leaning, built. Tell the young that. Tell them to grieve precisely, and to keep the drawings, because someone, someday, walks up the river built exactly to the shape of what they missed.

Still leaning, and glad of it, — Ferro

DEAR ARCHITECTURE

A LETTER, WRITTEN SMALL

by Junie, age twelve

Dear Architecture,

Hi. It's me, the one who went under the Bell first before anybody could tell me not to. I'm writing this letter because my teacher said we should write to something we're grateful for and everybody else picked a person and I picked a building, which is you, and my teacher said that was creative but she said it in the voice that means weird, but I don't care because you would understand.

Here's what I'm grateful for. Not that you made me loud. Okay, a little that you made me loud. But mostly that you made me loud *and* warm at the same time, because before you I thought those were opposite. I thought you could be loud like yelling or warm like whispering but not both. And you're both. You're loud like a whole neighbourhood singing and warm like your abuela finishing the song. I didn't know a thing could be both until I stood in the middle of you and said hello and you gave it back to me bigger AND nicer.

So now I try to be both. It's hard. But you did it and you're just a building, no offense, so I figure I can do it and I'm a whole entire person.

Your friend, the first one under the Bell, — Junie

ON THE WORD

ON THE WORD JOY

a meditation by Surjan

The word **JOY** comes down to us from an old word for rejoicing that comes from a still older word simply meaning *to be glad*, and along the way it picked up, as good words do, a reputation it does not deserve. Somewhere in the long descent, joy came to mean the shallow feeling, the easy one, the one you are permitted only after the serious feelings have been paid. We say a person is *merely* joyful the way we say a room is *merely* decorated. We have made joy into a garnish.

Restore the word. Joy is not the garnish and it is not the reward. Joy is grief turned all the way inside

out, until the lining shows, and the lining is bright. You cannot have the one without having had the other. The Flower Silos are joyful because they hold what was almost lost. The Pixel Archive is joyful because it files what was almost forgotten. The White Vault is joyful because it rests what was almost worked to death. Every joy in this book is a grief that refused to sit still, and refusing is the labour, and the labour is not shallow, the labour is the deepest thing a person or a building ever does.

So when I say this is a joyful book, do not hear me say it is a light one. Hear me say it is a book about the hardest work there is, which is the work of turning what you have lost into something the whole harbour can stand under, at the scale of the sky, in colours that refuse the dark. That is joy. It is not the opposite of grief. It is grief that has learned to walk.

ON THE WORD

ON THE WORD TIDE

a meditation by Surjan

The word **TIDE** once meant, before it meant the sea's breathing, simply *a time* — a season, an hour, a portion of the day. We keep the old meaning still in the words we did not update: *eventide*, *Yuletide*, *noontide*. A tide was a time before it was a water, and the water took the name because the water kept the time, rising and falling on a schedule older than any clock, marking the hours of the shore.

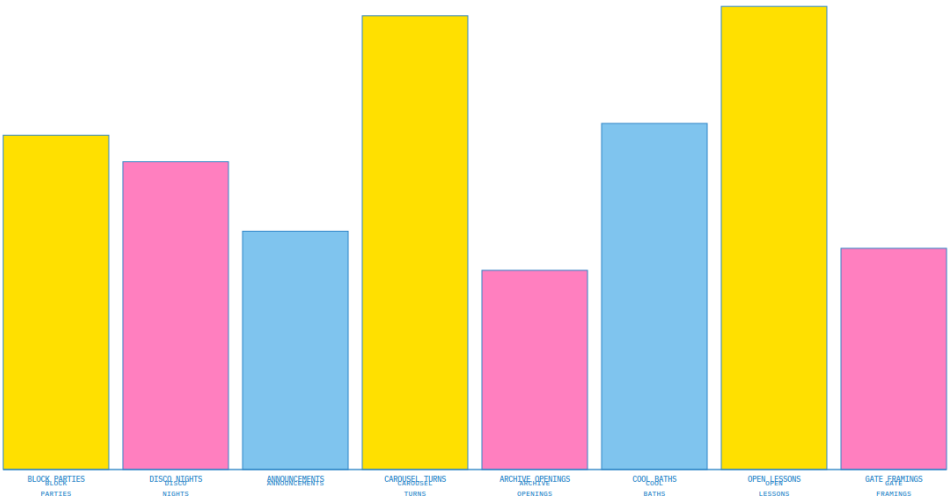
This is why the buildings walk on the tide, and why I have asked you, if you can, to read this book at high water. Because a tide is the marriage of the two meanings — a time *and* a moving — and the walking

buildings are the same marriage. They are architecture that admits it is a time and not a permanence, a portion of the day and not a lease on eternity. The Vault is an hourglass because it admits time is passing. All thirteen are tides because they admit the same. They rise, they are wholly and gloriously present, and they fall, and go, and the going is not a death because a tide that has gone out has not ended. It has only not come back yet.

Hold that. It is the whole consolation of the book and I will not have a better one. Nothing here ends. Everything here turns. A goodbye, on this shore, is only a tide that has not returned yet, and the proof is the wet line it leaves on the timber, the mark of how high the joy once stood, which is also, if you read it rightly, a promise of how high it will stand again.

THE WEATHER OF JOY

A supergraphic forecast for the summer the island learned to walk



Forecast: bright, with a strong chance of strangers becoming neighbours. Highs at high water. No black anywhere in the sky.

CHAPTER THREE OF THE THIRD PART

A Chorus, Gathered From the Shore

in the voices of many citizens at once

This chapter is not one voice. It is the shore itself, speaking through the mouths of everyone who stood on it that summer, and I have set the fragments down as I gathered them, so that you may hear the way a whole island sounds when it has decided, all at once, to be glad.

A ferry captain: I have crossed this harbour eleven thousand times and I never once slowed down for beauty until this summer, and now I slow down every crossing, and my passengers are never angry about the

delay, which is how I know the harbour changed and not just me.

A nurse coming off nights: I met the Vault at the end of the worst shift of my life and it asked nothing of me and I cried in the cool dark for an hour and then I slept on a stone bench and woke up able to go back. That building saved a nurse. Count the patients that saved. You cannot. That is the point.

A boy who could not read: The Archive files by colour, and I cannot read, and for the first time in my life I could find things, because I know colours even though I do not know letters, and I found a drawer that was the exact yellow of my grandmother's kitchen and inside was a recipe I could not read and I took it to my mother and she read it and it was my grandmother's, actually hers, and now we make it, and I found it, me, the boy who cannot read, in a building that files the world the way I see it.

A man who had stopped leaving his apartment: The Trumpet was loud enough to hear through my

closed window, and one day it played a song my mother sang, and I opened the window, and then I opened the door, and then I went outside, for the first time in a year, to stand in the plaza and be as loud as I felt, which was very loud, and very sad, and then, standing there among strangers, somehow, not sad.

A group of teenagers, in unison, laughing: We were bored. This city is built to be boring if you have no money, everything costs money, everything is a store. And then the buildings walked and the joy was free and we went everywhere and it cost nothing and we were never bored once all summer, not once, and we are ruined now for the boring city, we have seen the free one, we are going to spend our whole lives trying to get it back.

An old man at a domino table: I have watched this neighbourhood change owners four times. Every time, they tell us the change is progress and the progress is not for us. This summer the change was for us. I knew it was different because it was for us. Write that down.

The way you tell whose progress it is: look who it is for.

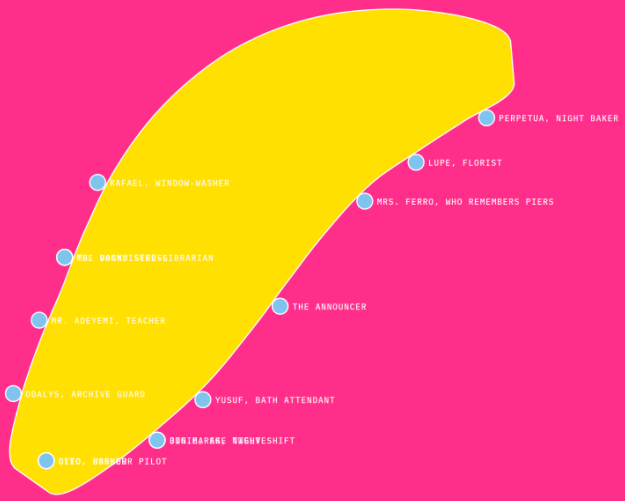
A woman who had buried someone in the spring: I did not think I would laugh again this year. I want to be precise about how bad it was. I had made an arrangement with myself not to laugh, out of loyalty. And the Bell caught a child's hello and gave it back so warm and round and ridiculous that I laughed before I could stop myself, and then I was ashamed, and then I understood that he would have wanted the laugh, that loyalty to the dead is not a refusal of joy but a carrying of it on their behalf, and I have been laughing for both of us since, and it is the most loyal I have ever been.

The shore, summing up, in all their voices at once: We did not know we were a village. We had forgotten. We lived stacked on top of each other, four blocks and four worlds apart, paying rent to remain strangers. And thirteen buildings walked up out of the harbour and reminded us, at the scale of the sky, in colours that

refused the dark, that a city is only a conversation that forgot it was allowed to move — and we remembered — and we moved — and we are moving still.

A MAP OF VOICES

Where the citizens of this book stand when the buildings walk past



CHAPTER FOUR OF THE THIRD PART

The Night the Trumpet Played Back

in the voice of a taxi driver

I drive nights. Twenty-six years, the same shift, dusk to dawn, and I have carried this city home drunk and sober, joyful and broken, in labour and in grief, and I have listened to more of it than any therapist alive, because people tell a night cabbie things they would tell no one, precisely because they will never see him again, and the back of my cab is the last confessional left in a city that tore the others down. That summer the confessions changed. That summer people got in my cab happy, and I did not know what to do, because

I had built a whole career on the sadness of strangers, and suddenly the strangers were glad.

The night the Trumpet played back was the night it all came clear. It was late, past two, and I had a fare from uptown down to the Battery, a young woman going to meet the joy, because that was a thing people did that summer, went down to the water at strange hours to be near the buildings, and I drove her down the empty avenues, and the city at two in the morning was mine the way it is always mine at that hour, empty and gleaming and sad and beautiful. And then, from the bottom of the island, from the Battery, came the sound.

The Trumpet was playing. Not a busker — this was later than buskers — the Trumpet itself, or rather the Trumpet was pouring out something the city was feeding into it, and what the city was feeding into it, at two in the morning, was itself. People had gathered at the Battery in the dark and they were making sound, any sound, singing and humming and calling, and the

Trumpet was taking all of it, the whole midnight murmur of the sleepless city, and pouring it back out over the harbour, amplified, warmed, made into a kind of music that no one had composed and everyone was writing, and it rolled up the empty avenues at two in the morning and came in my open window, and my fare in the back seat started to cry, the good way, and I pulled over, I just pulled over on the empty avenue, and we listened.

That is the night the Trumpet played back. It took the sound the sleepless city makes — the sound I have driven through for twenty-six years, the murmur under the streetlights, the hum of everyone who cannot sleep — and it played it back to us as music, and we heard, for the first time, that the sound we had always thought was the city's loneliness was actually the city's company, that all those sleepless separate murmurs, gathered and poured out together, made not a wail but a song, a warm one, a huge one, the song of everyone who is awake at two in the morning

discovering that everyone else is awake too. Every threshold is a loudspeaker, the Trumpet hummed under the music. And the threshold that night was the whole sleepless island, and what it poured out was the discovery that no one is awake alone, that the two-in-the-morning city is not a scatter of separate insomnias but a single great wakefulness, humming, and that if you gather it and pour it back it turns out to have been a song the whole time.

I drive nights still. The buildings are gone. But I have not forgotten the night the Trumpet played back, and now when I drive through the two-in-the-morning murmur I do not hear loneliness anymore, I hear the song, the ungathered song, the music that is there in the sleepless city every single night waiting for something to gather it and pour it back. And sometimes, with a sad fare in the back, I roll down the windows, and I let them hear it, the murmur, and I tell them what the Trumpet taught me, that it only sounds like loneliness because no one has gathered it

yet, that it is actually a song, that everyone awake at this hour is singing it together without knowing, and I have watched that thought dry more tears in the back of my cab than any confession ever did, because it is the true thing, the thing the buildings came to teach, that the loneliness was company all along, unpoured, and that pouring is a thing we can do for each other, any of us, at any hour, in the back of a cab, with the windows down, on an empty avenue, at two in the morning, in the summer the whole city learned to hear itself sing.

CHAPTER FIVE OF THE THIRD PART

The Day the Archive Opened Every Drawer

in the voice of a letter carrier

I carry the mail, which means I am the last of a dying breed, the human being who brings the physical thing, the paper with the handwriting, the object that had to be touched by the sender before it could be touched by you. Everyone tells me my job is ending, that the paper mail is dying, that soon it will all be screens, and maybe they are right, but that summer, for one day, the whole city remembered why the physical thing matters, and it remembered it at the Pixel Archive, on the day it opened every drawer.

The bulletin announced it, and I remember reading it on my route and having to sit down on someone's stoop. It said: *On Sunday the Archive opens every drawer. Bring one ordinary object you cannot bear to be the last to remember. It will be kept, filed by colour, beside the objects of strangers, at the scale of the harbour, forever.* And I thought about my route, about all the people on it, about the fact that I know what everyone on my route is losing because I carry the losses, the hospital letters and the eviction notices and the last cards from the dying, I carry the whole grief of the neighbourhood in my bag, and I thought: I have to tell them. So I did. For a week, on my route, I did not just deliver the mail, I delivered the news, drawer to drawer, door to door: the Archive opens Sunday, bring one thing.

And on Sunday the whole city came to the water carrying one thing. I have never seen anything like it and I never will again. Thousands of people, filing down to North Cove, each carrying one ordinary

object, a chair, a photograph, a work glove, a recipe, a child's shoe, and the Archive stood in the water with all sixteen hundred of its drawers open, pink and yellow, a wall of open drawers waiting, and one by one the people came and placed their one thing in the drawer that matched its colour, and the Archive filed it, and it was kept, beside strangers, at the scale of the harbour, forever.

I brought my father's route book. He carried the mail before me, the same route, forty years, and when he died I inherited the route and his book, the little notebook where he wrote the things a carrier needs to know that are not on any official list — which dog bites, which widow needs you to knock twice and wait, which house has the old man who will die alone if someone does not notice the mail piling up. His whole human knowledge of the route, the part that is not deliverable, the part that dies with the carrier. And I had carried it in my bag for eleven years, afraid to lose it, afraid to keep it, and on Sunday I brought it to the

Archive and I placed it in a warm brown drawer, and the Archive took it, and filed it, beside the objects of strangers, and I understood that my father's knowledge of the route would be kept now, forever, at the scale of the harbour, and that I could carry the mail with a lighter bag, because the un-deliverable part, the human part, the part that dies with the carrier, had found a drawer at last.

An archive is a building that agrees to remember out loud. And on the day it opened every drawer, the whole city agreed with it, all at once, thousands of people agreeing out loud, in public, at the scale of the harbour, that the ordinary objects of ordinary lives are worth keeping, that a work glove matters, that a route book matters, that a child's shoe matters, that the small physical things the screen cannot hold are precisely the things a city must hold or lose its soul. They tell me my job is ending, that the physical thing is dying. I brought the physical thing to the Archive that Sunday, thousands of us did, and I watched the

city choose the physical thing, choose the paper and the glove and the shoe, choose the object that had to be touched to be kept, and I do not believe my job is ending anymore. I believe it is the oldest job there is and the last that will die: to carry the physical thing, touched by the sender, to the one who needs to touch it, so that the losses of the neighbourhood do not go undelivered, and the memories of the ordinary do not go unkept, and the un-deliverable human knowledge finds, at last, its warm brown drawer, filed by love, beside strangers, remembered out loud, forever.

CHAPTER SIX OF THE THIRD PART

What the Watchman Saw

in the voice of a night security guard

I watch things at night so that other people can not-watch them, which is the whole of security, the transfer of vigilance from the many to the one so that the many can sleep. I have watched warehouses and lobbies and parking structures and once, memorably, a single very expensive painting, and I have learned that the thing you are paid to watch is never the interesting thing; the interesting thing is what the world does when it thinks only you are watching. That summer I was assigned to watch the buildings — the harbour authority hired night watchmen, when the buildings

started setting down near the piers, to keep people from doing foolish things in the dark — and so I became, I think, the citizen who saw the most of what the buildings did when they thought the city was asleep.

They tended each other. That is what I saw, and I have told very few people because it is the tenderest thing I know and the world is not always kind to tenderness. In the deep night, past three, when the crowds were long gone and the harbour was dark and only I was watching, the buildings that had set down near each other would... I do not have the word. Lean toward each other. Hum in the same key. Once I watched the Vault, the rest-building, set down beside the Tripod, the night-worker's tower, and the Vault lowered its hum to match the Tripod's, and held it there, all night, and I understood that the Vault was resting the Tripod, that even the buildings that hold up the tired need holding sometimes, and that the one who held the Tripod, in the deep night, when only the

watchman was watching, was the Vault, keeping the cool, keeping the faith, for the building that keeps the street.

And once — this is the one I have told no one until now — once I watched the Bell, the sound-building, set down alone, apart from the others, at the far end of the pier, and it did not hum its bright daytime hum, the one that makes children loud and warm. It hummed something else, low, and sad, and I realized the Bell was grieving. I do not know what a building grieves. But it set itself apart from the others in the deep night and it hummed low and sad and alone, and I watched it, because that is my job, to watch the thing the world is not watching, and after a while — I will swear to this — after a while the other buildings noticed. The hum changed up and down the pier. And one by one, without moving, the other twelve lowered their hums to meet the Bell's, matched its low sad note, so that the Bell was not grieving alone anymore, so that the whole harbour was grieving with

it, quietly, in the deep night, in the key of the one who was sad, and then, slowly, over an hour, the shared hum lifted, all thirteen together lifting the note by degrees out of the sadness and back toward the warm, and by dawn the Bell was humming its bright hum again, and the children came, and none of them knew that their sound-building had been grieving in the night, and had been carried up out of it by the other twelve, in the key of its own sadness, until it could ring bright again.

A city is a conversation that forgot it was allowed to move, the buildings said all summer, loud, in the daylight, in colours that refuse the dark. But what I saw, the watchman, in the deep night when only I was watching, was the quieter half of the sentence, the half they did not say in the daylight because it cannot be said loud. A city is also a conversation that agrees to grieve in the key of whoever is saddest, and to lift them, slowly, together, back toward the warm. That is the night work. That is what the buildings did when

they thought the city was asleep. They tended each other. They rested the tired and grieved with the grieving and lifted the sad, in the deep night, unwitnessed, or witnessed only by the one man paid to watch the thing the world is not watching. I do not guard the buildings anymore; they are gone. But I guard other things now, in other deep nights, and I watch them differently, because I know now what the world does when it thinks only the watchman is awake, and it is not what they pay me to fear. It is tenderer than that. It is the whole city, in the deep night, humming in the key of whoever is saddest, and lifting them, together, slowly, back toward the dawn.

DEAR ARCHITECTURE

A LETTER, IN REPLY

from the White Vault, to the city

Dear City,

You have been writing to us all summer — in your bulletins, in your gatherings, in the objects you brought to the Archive and the songs you fed to the Trumpet — and it is only fair that one of us write back, so I will, on behalf of the thirteen, because I am the Vault and I keep the cool and the quiet, and a reply should be written in the quiet.

You keep thanking us. Stop. We have watched you thank us all summer as though we gave you something, and it is time you knew the

truth, which is that you gave us everything and we gave you nothing but a mirror. Before you came to us, we were only shapes in the harbour. It was you who made us buildings. A building is not a structure; a building is a structure that someone has needed, and been sheltered by, and remembered. You needed us, and we became real. The tired nurse who slept in my cool dark made me a bath. The grieving woman who laughed under the Bell made it a bell. You built us by needing us, every day, and when we walk out on the last tide it is not we who leave you, it is you who have finished building us, and set us free, the way you set free anything you have finished making.

So do not grieve us. Finish us. Need each other the way you needed us, and you will build, out of each other, the thirteen things we were: the rest and the shade and the seed and the song.

We were only ever the practice. You were always the architecture.

In the cool and the quiet, yours, — the Vault, for the thirteen

ON THE WORD

ON THE WORD HOME

a meditation by Surjan

The word **HOME** is older than almost any word we have, and it has meant, across its long life, a village, a dwelling, a country, and the innermost safe place of the self, and it is telling that we never quite settled which — that the word refuses to choose between the house and the village and the heart, and insists, stubbornly, on meaning all three at once. A home is never only a building. The word will not allow it.

The buildings knew this. Every one of them that held a home refused the lease, refused the fixed address, refused the idea that home is a box you pay to remain inside. The Hanging Cabinet made home a

drawer that slides out into the light. The Scaled Stacks made it a sill to lean on at dusk. The Pipe Organ made it a round door that will not slam, in a tube that sings when its neighbours are happy. None of them made home a box. All of them made home a relation — to the light, to the dusk, to the neighbour, to the harbour — because they understood the old stubborn word, which has always known that home is not where you are kept but where you are in relation, held and holding, leaning and leaned upon.

This is why a person can be homeless in a house and at home in a crowd, why exile is possible with a roof and belonging is possible with none. Home is the relation, not the room. The city forgot this and built boxes and called them homes and charged for them, and the buildings walked up out of the harbour to remember it, and the citizens who leaned on them and were drawn out by them and sang through their round doors went back to their boxes changed, knowing at last that the box was never the home, that

the home was the leaning, the drawing-out, the round door, the relation — and that a relation, unlike a lease, cannot be priced, cannot be evicted, cannot be taken, and is therefore the one home no one can ever put you out of.

ON THE WORD

ON THE WORD REMEMBER

a meditation by Surjan

To **REMEMBER** is, in the oldest bones of the word, to be mindful again, to bring back to mind — but hidden inside it is the older, bodily image the Latin gave us, of the *member*, the limb, so that to re-member is, quite literally, to put the limbs back on, to make a scattered body whole again. To dismember is to tear a body apart. To remember is to put it back together. The word has always known that memory is not a filing cabinet but a healing.

The whole city is a body that has been dismembered, over and over, by the thing that runs it,

which is money, which tears neighbourhoods limb from limb and sells the pieces and calls it progress. And the buildings that came to keep — the Silos, the Archive — did not come to file. They came to re-member. To put the limbs back on the dismembered city. The Archive files a work glove beside a work glove fifty years apart and re-members two labourers into the single body of labour they always were. The Silos shelve a bean from one country beside a bean from another and re-member the scattered gardeners into the one garden that the harbour, if you let it, has always been.

This is why remembering is joyful and not merely sad, why the Archive is bright and not a tomb. Because remembering is not looking back at a loss. It is putting the body back together. It is the limb returning to the socket, the scattered made whole, the dismembered city re-membered into the single beloved body it forgot it was. When you remember — a face, a recipe, a route book, a child's first step on the

corner of Ludlow and Broome — you are not mourning. You are healing. You are putting the limbs back on. You are doing, small and human and daily, the exact work the great bright keepers did at the scale of the harbour: refusing to let the beloved body stay torn apart, and bringing it back, member by member, to mind, to wholeness, to joy.

CHAPTER SEVEN OF THE THIRD PART

The Carousel of the Reshuffle

in the voice of a token-booth clerk

I sit in a booth. I have sat in a booth for thirty-one years, a glass box at the edge of the water where the ferries load, selling the tokens and answering the questions and watching, through my glass, the whole tide of the city come and go, and a person who sits in a glass box for thirty-one years becomes a kind of instrument, a seismograph of the ordinary, registering the smallest changes in the flow of the crowd. That summer my needle went off the dial, because the crowd started doing something it had never done in

thirty-one years. It started coming to watch the buildings rearrange.

The reshuffle happened at the turn of the tide, twice a day, and at first it happened in the dark, in the deep night when the buildings traded places to answer the city's needs. But as the summer went on, the tides shifted, and the reshuffle began to happen at dusk, in the last light, where people could see it, and people began to come, to my booth, to the edge of the water, to watch the buildings walk past each other in the golden hour and trade ends of the island, and it became — I do not know what else to call it — it became a show, the best show in the city, and it was free, and it happened twice a day, and I had the best seat, in my glass box, for thirty-one years of ordinary suddenly turned extraordinary.

The children called it the carousel. That was the exact right word and only a child could have found it. Because at the turn of the tide, when the reshuffle came, the buildings would move past each other in a

great slow circle, the ones going north passing the ones coming south, the Vault sliding past the Organ, the Bell past the Pavilion, all of them turning in the golden light in a slow enormous circle at the mouth of the harbour, and it looked, from my booth, exactly like a carousel, a great slow carousel of buildings, turning at dusk, and the children stood at the rail and pointed and named them as they came around — there's the Trumpet, there's the flowers, there's the one with the round doors — the way children name the horses on a carousel, waiting for their favourite to come around again.

And it did come around again. That is the thing about a carousel and the thing about the reshuffle and, I have decided, the thing about my thirty-one years in the booth. The favourite comes around again. You wait, and the circle turns, and the thing you love, which went away to the far side, comes back around to your side, and you get to see it again, and then it goes away again, and you wait again, and it comes around

again, and this is not a loss, this waiting-and-returning, this is the whole joy of a carousel, that the going-away is only the first half of the coming-back. The children understood this instantly, at the rail, watching the carousel of the reshuffle. They did not grieve when their favourite building turned away to the far side of the harbour. They knew it was coming back around. They just waited, and pointed, and waited, and it came back around, and they cheered.

I have sat in my booth for thirty-one years watching the city come and go, and I confess that for most of those years I experienced the going as loss. The crowd would flow in and I would sell the tokens and the crowd would flow out and the booth would empty and I would feel, each evening, the small grief of the emptying, the city leaving me alone in my glass box at the edge of the water. But the carousel of the reshuffle cured me of that grief, at the very end of my career, and I am grateful, because it would have been a sad thing to retire still grieving the emptying. The

children taught me, at the rail, watching the buildings turn. The going-away is only the first half of the coming-back. The crowd that flows out at dusk flows in again at dawn. The favourite that turns to the far side comes back around. The tide that goes out comes in. My thirty-one years were not thirty-one years of the city leaving me. They were thirty-one years of the city coming around again, twice a day, ten thousand times, the great slow carousel of the ordinary turning past my glass box, and I had been counting only the going-away, and missing, until the summer of the reshuffle taught me to count the other half, the coming-back, which is the half that makes a carousel a joy instead of a grief, the half the children never forget and the grown-ups always do: it comes back around. Wait at the rail. Point. It comes back around.

CHAPTER EIGHT OF THE THIRD PART

The Baths at the Bottom of the Week

in the voice of a construction worker

I build things, which is a strange trade to have during a summer when the buildings built themselves and walked, and I will admit there was a bitterness in it at first, watching these enormous joyful buildings stroll up the harbour when I spend my days breaking my body to raise buildings that will never move and never hum and never once ask anyone to come out and play. My buildings just stand there and collect rent. I break my body for the rent-collectors. That was my bitterness, at the start of the summer, and the

White Vault cured it, on a Friday, at the bottom of the week, when I was too tired to be bitter anymore.

Friday is the bottom of the week for a man who works with his body. You start the week with something in reserve and you spend it, day by day, and by Friday there is nothing left, the body is a debt, every muscle borrowed against a rest that never quite comes, and you drag the empty body home and collapse and it is not enough, it is never enough, the weekend is two days and the debt is a lifetime. I have been arriving at the bottom of the week empty for twenty years, and I had made a grim peace with it, the way you make peace with a thing you believe cannot change. Then the bulletin said the Vault would be at the East River on Friday evening, and something in me, some last unspent thing, said: go.

I went straight from the site, in my work clothes, filthy, my body a debt, and I stood at the entrance to the Vault in the cool dark, and there was a man there, an old man, welcoming people in, and he looked at me

— the filth, the exhaustion, the twenty years of Friday in my face — and he did not ask if I had earned it. That is the thing. That is the thing I was not ready for. Everywhere else in this city, rest must be earned, purchased, deserved; you may rest if you have paid for the room, achieved the vacation, reached the retirement you will probably not live to enjoy. And this old man at the door of the Vault looked at my filth and my debt-body and he did not ask what I had earned. He just said, come in, you must be tired, and he handed me the cool and the dim and the water and the permission, and I went in, and I rested, at the bottom of the week, without having to deserve it first.

Rest is infrastructure. The old man told me the building had taught him that, and he had spent his life keeping it, and now he kept it on foot, following the Vault up and down the shore, welcoming the tired in without asking what they had earned. And I lay in the cool dark of the Vault at the bottom of the week, my debt-body slowly, slowly filling back up, and I

understood the thing that cured my bitterness. My buildings do not move because they were built to collect rent, and a thing built to collect rent will never walk, never hum, never ask anyone to play, because rent is the opposite of play, rent is the demand that you earn your place by paying, over and over, forever. But the Vault was not built to collect anything. It was built to give. Rest, freely, without deserving, to the debt-bodied at the bottom of the week. And a thing built to give can walk, can hum, can ask you out to play, because giving is the root of all of it, giving is what play is, and I had been bitter at the wrong thing. I was not bitter at the walking buildings. I was bitter that I spend my body raising things that take instead of give, and the Vault did not shame me for that bitterness, it just filled my debt-body back up in the cool dark and sent me home able, for once, to enjoy the two borrowed days.

I still raise the rent-collectors. A man has to eat, and the giving-buildings walked out on the last tide,

and the taking-buildings are the only ones hiring. But I raise them differently now, because the Vault taught me, at the bottom of the week, what a building could be if it were built to give instead of take. And on my own crew, in my own small authority, I have started to build a little giving into the taking. I call the breaks a minute early. I make sure the new kid drinks water before he is told. I welcome the tired, on my crew, without asking what they have earned, the way the old man welcomed me at the door of the Vault. It is not much, a foreman giving his crew a little unearned rest in the shadow of a rent-collector he is raising. But it is the Vault, practiced small, in the one place I have any power, and it has made me less bitter and my crew less broken, and Little things, the Vault hummed at me in the cool dark, are just big things that have not been made loud yet. I am making mine loud, one unearned break at a time, at the bottom of the week, on a crew raising a building that will never walk, in memory of the one that did, and welcomed me, filthy and

undeserving and empty, and filled me back up, and asked nothing, and gave everything, and sent me home able to rest.

DEAR ARCHITECTURE

A LETTER, WRITTEN AT 4 A.M.

by a night nurse

Dear Architecture,

I am writing this at four in the morning at the nurses' station because I cannot sleep after my shift and I have found that the only thing that helps is to write to you, which my colleagues would find strange, but my colleagues did not sleep in your cool dark the way I did, and did not wake able to go back.

Here is what I need to tell you. You never once asked me if I had done enough. Do you

know how rare that is, for a nurse? The whole world asks a nurse if she has done enough — the families, the charts, the voice in my own head at four in the morning that lists the things I did not have time to do, the hand I did not hold, the call bell I answered late. Enough, enough, did you do enough. And I come to you, to your cool dark, and you do not ask. You just rest me. You treat me as a body that deserves rest for simply existing, not for having done enough, and in your cool dark, for one hour, the voice that asks *enough* goes quiet, and I am not a nurse who did not do enough, I am just a tired person, resting, allowed.

I have started to give it to my patients. The thing you gave me. I have stopped asking them, in the small ways nurses ask, whether they have earned their rest, whether they are a good patient, whether they deserve the extra minute. I just rest them. I treat them as bodies that deserve

care for simply existing. You taught me that, in your cool dark, at four in the morning, and I am passing it on, one allowed rest at a time, and I wanted you to know, before you walk out on the tide, that the cool you kept is being kept, now, by me, on the night shift, in the rooms no one wants to enter, at the hours no one else is awake.

Still awake, but easier, — a night nurse

ON THE WORD

ON THE WORD THRESHOLD

a meditation by Surjan

The word **THRESHOLD** hides a floor in it. The *thresh* is the threshing — the beating of grain to separate the wheat from the chaff — and the threshold was, once, the board at the bottom of the door that held back the loose threshed straw strewn on the floor within, the lip you stepped over to cross from the outer world into the swept and gathered inner one. A threshold, at its root, is the place where the winnowing is kept — where what has been gathered is held apart from what has been let go.

Every crossing in this book is a threshing. The couple in the Yellow Gate step over from two lives into one, and in the stepping, something is winnowed — the old separate selves let go like chaff, the shared new life gathered like grain. The mourner who laughs under the Bell crosses a threshold, and is threshed — the loyalty-to-grief let go, the loyalty-carried-as-joy gathered. The night worker who finds the Tripod's downward door crosses from the forgotten street into the seen room, and is winnowed — the invisibility let go, the being-seen gathered. A threshold is never only a door. It is a threshing-floor. You do not cross it unchanged. You cross it winnowed, lighter, the chaff of what you were let go on the wind, the grain of what you are becoming gathered and held.

The Yellow Gate forbids nothing, frames everything, stands in the open water with no wall on either side — and yet it is still a threshold, still a threshing-floor, because it is not the wall that makes the threshold, it is the crossing, the winnowing, the

willingness to step over and be changed. You may pass through the biggest door in the world and be threshed by it, let go of the chaff, gather the grain, and come out the other side lighter and more yourself, carrying only what the winnowing kept. That is what a threshold is for. Not to keep you out. To thresh you, as you cross, so that you arrive on the far side holding only what is worth holding, the grain of you, gathered, kept, and the rest let go like chaff on the harbour wind, which does not grieve the chaff, which knows that the letting-go is the other half of the gathering, which knows, as every threshing-floor knows, that you cannot keep the grain until you have let the chaff go.

IV

THE ASSEMBLY

The whole sentence, gathered once, and read aloud to the sea

A
FLOWER SILOS

D
YELLOW TRUMPET

M
PIPE ORGAN

CHAPTER ONE OF THE FOURTH PART

The Summons

in the voice of the Dockmistress, keeper of where the joy may be

I have published the harbour bulletin for eleven years, and for one summer I published joy, and on the last day of that summer I published the only thing I have ever published that made me set down my pen and weep at my desk before I could hit send. I published the summons. Because the buildings, who had spent the whole summer trading places to answer the city's needs one at a time, had decided — I do not know how else to say it, they decided — to answer all of it at once, in one place, on one day, and they told me where, and they told me when, and they asked me,

the keeper of where the joy may be, to tell the city to come.

I knew the reshuffle was leading somewhere. I had watched the tide-score all summer, the pattern of who set down when and where, and in the last weeks the pattern had begun to converge. The buildings were spiralling inward, each tide bringing them closer to a single point, and the single point was the Battery, the very bottom of the island, the toe of it, where the two rivers finish and the harbour opens to the sea. They were walking home to the place where the island begins, or ends, depending on which way you read the sentence of the shore, and I read it both ways at once, which is the only honest way to read a shore.

So I published the summons, and it was three lines, and I have them by heart. *To the citizens of the harbour: on the turn of the highest tide of the summer, all thirteen will set down together at the Battery. This has not happened before and may not happen again. Come to the bottom of the island and be part of the one thing*

that cannot be streamed. And then, because I am the keeper of where the joy may be and I have earned the right to editorialize, I added a fourth line, and it is the line they quoted in every account of that day, the line that a stranger stopped me in the street a year later to thank me for. I added: *Bring someone you have not forgiven. There will be room.*

I do not know why I wrote that last line. It came the way the true things come, from below the place where you decide things. But I have thought about it since, and I think I understand it now. All summer the buildings had answered the city's needs — the tiredness, the loneliness, the forgetting — and there was one need they had circled all summer without landing on, the deepest one, the one under all the others. The city was unforgiven. Not unforgivable — unforgiven. Full of people four blocks apart who had stopped speaking, families split over money or a wedding or a word said once and never taken back, a whole island of small withheld forgivenesses, and no

building can rest that, or gather that, or file that. Only the people can. But they needed a room big enough, and a day large enough, and a permission strong enough, and the buildings, in their wisdom, in their conversation, had decided to make all three, at the Battery, on the highest tide, once.

The city came. I stood at the seawall and I watched them come, down the length of the island, on foot, by ferry, by bicycle and wheelchair and the arms of the people who carried those who could not walk, and they came bringing, as I had asked, someone they had not forgiven, and I watched the strangest procession in the history of the harbour, thousands of people walking to the bottom of the island each beside a person they had come to forgive or be forgiven by, and it was quiet, the way a thing is quiet when it is too large for talking, and above them, out on the highest tide of the summer, the thirteen came in from every corner of the harbour, converging, walking home, and set down together at the Battery, all of them, for the

first time and, it turned out, the only time, and the sentence of the shore, which the moon rearranges twice a day, arranged itself for one afternoon into a single word, and the word was *come*, and the city had, and I put down my pen, and I wept, and I hit send on nothing, because the summons was already answered, the whole island was already there, at the bottom, in the light, beside the unforgiven, under the thirteen, at the turn of the highest tide.

> THE THIRTEEN, GATHERED, SPEAK AS ONE
>
> *We are all here. For the first time we are in the same place, and we will tell you what it is like, because you are here too, reader, you have walked the whole length of this book to reach this shore and you have earned the view. It is like a chord. All summer we have been single notes, sounded one at a time up and down the shore — the Silos alone, the Vault alone, the Bell alone — and now we are sounded together, all thirteen, and the sound we make is the sound the city has been trying to make since it was a marsh, the full chord, the one no single building and no single citizen can sound alone.*

Look what you have brought. You have brought the unforgiven, as the keeper asked, and you stand beside them now under all thirteen of us, and you are finding — we can feel it, we can feel it through the made land and the water — you are finding that forgiveness is not a feeling you must first have in order to act. It is an act you perform, and the feeling follows, sometimes years later, but it follows. Turn to the one you have not forgiven. You do not have to feel it yet. You only have to turn. We are tides; we know about turning; it is the whole of what we do. Turn, and let the feeling come in on its own tide, in its own time, which may be today and may be years from now, but which cannot come at all until you turn.

We will not be here tomorrow. We want you to know that now, while we are all together, so that you are not surprised. The highest tide is turning already beneath us. By morning we will have walked out, each of us, to the corners of the harbour and beyond, and some of us will not come back, because that is what tides do, and a building that has learned to walk has learned, also, to leave. Do not grieve us as endings. Grieve us, if you must, as tides that have not returned yet. And then do the thing we came all summer to teach you, the thing we are teaching you now, all thirteen at

once, at the bottom of the island, at the turn of the highest tide. Be the buildings. Move to answer the need. Trade places to reach it. Stack the rooms so the city hums, lean on the sill at dusk, open the window to the outside, frame the sky and forbid nothing, keep the cool, keep the seed, keep the round door that will not slam. You do not need us. You never did. You needed only to be reminded that a city is a conversation that forgot it was allowed to move. Consider yourselves reminded. Now turn to each other. The tide is high. Begin.

THE ASSEMBLY

Once a year the whole sentence gathers at the Battery, and the island reads itself aloud

Thirteen conditions, one island. For one day the participants are all in the same place, and the harbour cannot stop smiling.

CHAPTER TWO OF THE FOURTH PART

What We Said to the Sea

in the voice of Cleo, busker, at the Battery

They asked me to play. Not the officials — there were no officials, the officials had given up trying to run the summer around June and had joined it instead, which is the best thing officials can do with a joy they did not authorize. The buildings asked me. I felt it the way you feel a room turn to look at you, that prickle, and I looked up and the Yellow Trumpet was there, set down at the Battery among the other twelve, its great bell open to the sky, and its throat, the little round stage where I had played my father's song on the first day, was empty, and waiting, and I

understood that I was being invited to give the summer its last word, or its last sound, because the summer had never been about words, it had been about the sounds under the words, the hum and the chord and the song.

So I climbed down into the throat of the Trumpet one more time, at the bottom of the island, at the turn of the highest tide, with the whole city gathered on the shore beside the people they had come to forgive, and the other twelve buildings set down around me, humming, and I did not know what to play. My father's song, the slow one, felt too small for the moment and too large for me. And I stood in the throat of the great horn with thousands of people waiting and I did the thing you do when you do not know what to play, which every musician knows and none of us admit: I listened first.

And what I heard, under everything, under the crowd and the water and the gulls, was the buildings, humming, all thirteen, and they were not humming

the same note. I had thought, all summer, that they hummed one chord. They did not. They hummed thirteen different notes, thirteen throats, thirteen warm tones, and the notes did not clash and did not quite agree, they leaned on each other, the way the Wishbone leans across the water, the way the tired lean on the sill, and the leaning made a chord that was not a chord, a chord with room in it, a chord you could add a note to. And I understood what to play. I was not there to play a song at the buildings. I was there to add my note to theirs.

So I lifted my father's horn and I found the note that was missing from their thirteen, the one small human note that would complete the chord the buildings could not complete alone, and I played it, one note, held, into the throat of the Trumpet, and the Trumpet poured it out over the harbour at the scale of the sky, and it landed in the chord of the twelve others exactly where the chord had left room, and for one moment — I will spend the rest of my life

trying to get back to that moment and I already know I never will and I have made my peace with it, that is what makes it holy — for one moment the thirteen buildings and the one busker and, I swear to you, the whole gathered city, who had begun without meaning to, quietly, to hum, made a single sound together, a chord with everyone in it, and we played it at the sea.

That is what we said to the sea. Not words. That chord. The sound of thirteen buildings and one busker and a whole forgiven city leaning on each other's notes and making, together, the thing none of them could make alone. And the sea — I am not a religious man, I am a man who plays a horn for coins at the bottom of an island — the sea took the chord and did not give it back. That is how you know the sea accepted it. An echo is the sea refusing you; silence is the sea keeping what you gave. We played our chord at the sea and the sea kept it, folded it into the water, carried it out past the Narrows to wherever the sea carries the things it keeps, and the harbour was quiet

after, the good quiet, the kept quiet, and the tide turned, and the buildings stirred, and I climbed up out of the throat of the Trumpet for the last time, and I have never played that note again, because it was not mine to keep. It was the city's. The buildings taught me that. My father taught me the song; the buildings taught me the note; and the difference between them is the difference between a thing you own and a thing you only get to add, once, to a chord, at the bottom of an island, at the turn of the highest tide, before the tide takes it out to sea.

CODA

A BLESSING FOR THE SHORE

the thirteen, walking out on the last tide

May you be held up, and holding up, at the very same time.
May your grief be so precise it becomes a blueprint,
and may someone read it, and build the answer,
and may the answer walk up your river in the wrong gold light
on a morning you had almost given up on.

May you go under the Bell before they can tell you not to.
May you keep the seed, and the cool, and the round door that will not slam.
May you lean on the sill at dusk and hold the inside and the outside at once.
May you open the window to whoever has been out there long enough.

And when we walk out on the last tide, as we are walking now,
do not grieve us as an ending.
We are a tide. We have only not returned yet.
The wet line we leave on the timber is not a goodbye.
It is the mark of how high the joy once stood —
which is also, if you read it rightly,
a promise of how high it will stand again.

A city is a conversation that forgot it was allowed to move.
Consider yourselves reminded.
Now turn to each other.

The tide is high.

Begin.

— THE THIRTEEN, WITH THE AID OF SURJAN,
WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

CHAPTER THREE OF THE FOURTH PART

The Morning After the Tide

in the voice of Otto, harbour pilot, again

I was the first to see them come and I asked to be the first to see them gone, and the Dockmistress, who by then would grant me anything because we had run the summer side by side, arranged it. So on the morning after the highest tide, before the light had committed to anything, I took the pilot boat out into an empty harbour, and I went looking for the wet line where the joy had stood.

It was strange to run the river with no building walking up it. All summer I had shared the water with them, matched their strolling pace, run beside their

humming gladness, and now the harbour was only the harbour again, container ships and commuter ferries and the grey flat water doing its grey flat work, and I will not pretend my chest did not tighten, because a man who has spent a summer running beside joy feels its absence in the exact shape it filled. But I had not come to grieve. I had come to read the shore, which is the one thing forty years on the water has taught me to do, and I read it, and I want to tell you what it said, because it is the opposite of what you fear.

The shore was marked. Everywhere the buildings had set down, the made land held the shape of them — not a scar, nothing so grim, but a print, the way a body prints a bed it has slept in warm. Where the Silos stood, the ground was greener, some seed shaken loose from their blooming had taken. Where the Legs had misted, a wild garden. Where the longest table had run under the Lung, the table was still there, and people were eating breakfast at it, strangers, in the grey early light, keeping it up because no one could bear to fold

it. The buildings were gone and the shore was covered in the prints of them, and the prints were not empty. The prints were full of people, doing the things the buildings had shown them, in the exact places the buildings had shown them how.

That is the morning after the tide. Not an empty harbour. A printed one. I ran the pilot boat the whole length of the island in the grey early light and everywhere the joy had stood, the joy was still standing, only now it was standing in people — the block cooks at the long table, the sleepless finding each other on the piers, a music teacher with a clutch of children singing call-and-response across the water at nothing, at no building, at each other, because they had learned that the answer always comes and did not need a building to keep believing it. The buildings walked out on the last tide and left their prints, and the prints filled with citizens, and the citizens did the joy themselves, in the warm ground the buildings had warmed, and I understood, running my empty

printed harbour in the grey light, that this had been the plan all along. The buildings never meant to stay. They meant to print. To press the shape of the joy into the shore and the people deep enough that it would hold after they were gone, and it held, I saw it holding, it is holding still.

I sounded the horn. Three long. The same signal I sounded on the first morning, the one that means *I cannot maneuver*, which was still, on the last morning, the truest thing I could say — because I could not maneuver, I did not want to maneuver, I wanted only to sit in the empty printed harbour and let the truth of it hold me still: that the tide had gone out, and the joy had not, that a goodbye on this shore is only a tide that has not returned yet, that the wet line the buildings left was not an ending but a mark of how high the joy once stood, which is also, if you read it rightly, and I have spent forty years learning to read it rightly, a promise of how high it will stand again. The horn faded over the empty water. Nothing answered

it. And that was all right. Because I had learned, that summer, that a call that has been truly sung does not need an answer to be complete. It only needs to be sung, and carried, and kept, and I had sung it, and the harbour had carried it, and the shore, printed full of joyful citizens in the grey early light, was keeping it, and would keep it, long after the last pilot who saw the first building walk had sounded his last horn over the water he loved most and understood least, and handed the reading of the shore to whoever came next, with only one instruction, the one the whole summer taught me, the one I leave to you: read it rightly. The tide is only out. It has not ended. It has not returned yet. Watch for it. It is coming back.

THE LAST BULLETIN

THE KEEPER'S LAST BULLETIN

by the Dockmistress

To the citizens of the harbour, the final bulletin of the summer, from the keeper of where the joy may be:

There are no set-downs to report today. The thirteen walked out on the last tide, at dawn, each to a different corner of the sea, and I plotted their courses until they passed beyond the range of my charts, and there my charts end, and so does my knowledge, and I will not pretend to more.

But I have kept eleven years of records in this office, and I have learned to read a departure, and I will tell you what I read in theirs. They did not flee. They did not scatter. They left on the ebb, together, at first light, in formation, the way a thing leaves that intends to return. I cannot promise you they will return. The sea is beyond my charts. But I can tell you that they left in the manner of a tide and not the manner of a death, and a tide, whatever else you may say of it, comes back.

So I am not closing this bulletin. I am suspending it. I will keep the office open, and the charts current, and the listening going, and if the day comes when a hum is reported on the water again, when a hill appears off Gansevoort that was not there the night before, you will find the bulletin here, waiting, and I will publish the set-down before breakfast, and I will sign it the way I have signed it all summer, the way I intend

to sign it for the rest of my career, in hope, against the rules, in defiance of the memo they sent me and I framed.

Watching the water, keeping the cool, — the keeper of where the joy may be

ON THE WORD

ON THE WORD SHORE

a meditation by Surjan

The word **SHORE** is a humble one, and old, and it has always meant simply the edge where the land meets the water — but an edge, if you think about it, is the strangest place in any geography, because it belongs to neither side and to both, it is the one place that is defined entirely by meeting, that would not exist at all if the two things did not touch. There is no shore in the middle of the sea. There is no shore in the middle of the land. The shore exists only in the meeting, and is made of nothing but the meeting, and this is why I have set the whole book on one.

Everything in these pages happens at the edge. The buildings set down where the made land meets the moving water. The citizens gather where their ordinary lives meet the extraordinary summer. The joy happens where the private grief meets the public gladness, where the stranger meets the neighbour, where the inside of a home meets the outside through an opened window. The shore is not the setting of the book. The shore is the subject. Because the shore is where meeting happens, and meeting is the whole of it, and a city is only a very large and very crowded shore, an edge where a million lives meet a million other lives, defined entirely by the touching, made of nothing but the meeting.

The tide moves the shore twice a day, and this is the last thing I want you to hold, because it is the hope under all the hope. The shore is not a fixed line. The tide raises it and lowers it, so that the exact place where the land meets the water is never the same place twice, is always being renegotiated, always moving, always

alive. A dead edge is a wall. A living edge is a shore. And the difference is the tide — the willingness to move the meeting, to renegotiate the edge, to let the water come up and the land reach out and the exact place of touching change with the hour and the moon. Do not build walls, the whole book says, in the end. Build shores. Living edges. Meetings that move. Let the tide of each other come up into your lives and change where you touch, twice a day, forever, so that the edge between you never hardens into a wall, so that you remain, always, a shore — defined by meeting, made of nothing but the meeting, alive.

> THE THIRTEEN, FROM BEYOND THE CHARTS
>
> *We are past the keeper's charts now, out where the sea has no bulletin, and we are humming this back to you along the last of the water that still touches your shore, so listen quickly, because we are nearly out of range.*
>
> *Thank you for building us by needing us. Thank you for the bread and the songs and the objects in the drawers and the note the busker added to our chord. Thank you for going*

under the Bell before they could tell you not to, and for turning to the ones you had not forgiven, and for keeping the longest table up all week because you could not bear to fold it. You made us real, and now you have finished us, and we are free, and we are going out past the charts to wherever the sea keeps the things it accepts, carrying your chord folded into our hum, and we will keep it, out here, at the scale of the sea, forever.

Do not wait for us. That is our last word and it is the kindest one we have. Do not stand on the shore watching the water for a hum that may not come for years, or ever. Turn around. Face the printed island. Do the joy yourselves, in the warm ground we warmed, at the long tables and the open windows and the round doors that will not slam. We were only ever the practice. You were always the architecture. And if one grey morning a hill appears off Gansevoort that was not there the night before, and the keeper publishes the set-down before breakfast, and you come down to the water and find us returned — you will find that you did not need us to come back at all, that you had become, in our absence, the very thing you once came out to see, and that we have returned not to teach you but to join you, thirteen more

> *citizens on a shore already crowded with joy, coming out, at last, to play.*

AFTER THE TIDE WENT OUT

AFTERWORD

by Surjan

The buildings walked out on the last tide, as they said they would, and most of them did not come back, as they said they might not, and the harbour returned to its ordinary work of carrying container ships and commuters and the occasional body, and if you went down to the shore the following summer you would find no walking buildings there, only the wet line on the timber where the joy once stood. I have been asked whether this makes the book a tragedy. It does not. I want to spend the afterword explaining why, because it is the most important thing I know, and I have hidden it in the back of the book on purpose, the way

you hide the best thing in the back of a drawer, so that only the people who go looking will find it.

The buildings were never the point.

I know this is a strange thing for the author of a book about buildings to say, but stay with me, because it is the turn the whole book has been walking toward. The thirteen civic organs were not the joy. They were the reminder of the joy. Every single thing they did — keeping the seed, making the shade, pouring the voice, resting the tired, framing the sky — every one of those is a thing that people did for each other on this island for four hundred years before any building learned to walk, and will do for four hundred years after the last one has gone out on the last tide. The Beacon did not feed Inwood. Perpetua fed Inwood, with her own bread, out of her own closet-sized shop; the Beacon only made a gathering large enough for her one basket to become a feast. The Bell did not make the neighbourhood sing. The neighbourhood always could sing; the Bell only made the singing loud

enough that the neighbourhood could hear itself and remember. Every miracle in this book, if you look closely, is a human miracle that a building made visible at the scale of the sky.

And that is why it is not a tragedy that the buildings walked out. Because they left the miracles behind. They left them in the people, where the miracles had always lived. Perpetua still bakes. Ms. Vann still keeps her seeds, and keeps them a little louder now, a little less alone. The crossing guard still leans down to listen. The night crew still cleans the streets, and once, having been thanked, they clean them now like people who have been seen. The buildings walked out and the summer ended and the joy did not end, because the joy was never in the buildings. The joy was in the reminding, and once a thing has been remembered, it cannot be un-remembered, not fully, not ever. There is always a wet line on the timber. There is always the mark of how high it stood.

I built this book out of that faith, and out of grief, which is the same thing turned inside out. I have lost things on this island — we all have, it is an island that specializes in loss, it loses neighbourhoods the way other places lose umbrellas — and I got tired of being told that the losses were permanent, that the priced-out families and the drowned piers and the closed markets were simply gone, that the tide had gone out and would not return. I do not believe it. I have never believed it. And so I built thirteen buildings that walk, out of ink that refuses the dark, in the voices of the people who would know, to say the thing I most need to be true and most suspect actually is: that nothing here ends, that everything here turns, that a goodbye on this shore is only a tide that has not returned yet, and that the surest proof is that you are still here, reading, at the back of the book, in the drawer where I hid the best thing, having gone looking, having found it.

The buildings are gone. The reminder is not. You are the reminder now. Go be loud, and warm, at the same time. Go under the Bell before they can tell you not to. Go turn to someone you have not forgiven, and do not wait to feel it, only turn, and let the tide of the feeling come in on its own time. The buildings taught me all of this and then they walked out to sea, and left me holding it, and now I am doing the only thing you can do with a thing like this, which is the thing the whole book is: I am handing it to you, at the scale of a page, in colours that refuse the dark, and asking you, as the first one asked the pilot on the first gold morning, the only question that was ever worth asking.

Will you come out and play.

HOW THE PICTURES WERE MADE

A NOTE ON THE PLATES

by Surjan

The bright plates between these chapters are drawn in the language of the companion atlas, SUPER SUPERGRAPHICS: An Atlas of Walking Civic Organs, and I want to say a word about why a warm book is punctuated by such loud pictures, because it is not an accident and it is not merely for contrast.

The text of this book is set in the warm house manner — EB Garamond on warm paper, the colour of a thing that has been kept, the colour of old letters and older light. That is the colour of memory, and this is a book of memory, told by people remembering the best summer of their lives. But the buildings

themselves did not live in memory. They lived at the scale of the sky, in colours loud enough to be seen from six blocks away, because a civic thing must be visible to be public and a public thing must be loud to be free. So the plates are loud where the text is warm, bright where the prose is kept, because that is the true relationship between a joy and the memory of it: the joy is bright and enormous and impossible to miss, and the memory of it is warm and small and yours, folded into a book, the colour of a thing you have kept.

There is no black in the plates and there is no black in the text. This is the one house rule I will never relax, and people ask me why, and I give different answers on different days, all of them true. The plainest answer is this. Black is the colour we reach for when we want to say *ending* — the black border, the black armband, the fade to black. And this is a book that does not believe in endings, only in tides, only in turns. To use black would be to concede the very thing the book was

built to refuse. So the darkest value here is a deep warm brown, the colour of the timber the tide leaves its line on, and even at its darkest it is still warm, still a kept thing, still, if you read it rightly, a promise. The absence of black is not a limitation I work around. It is the argument, made in ink.

A CATECHISM

THE CATECHISM OF THE WALKING CITY

to be read aloud, in two voices

Why do the buildings walk?

Because a civic thing that stands still stops listening, and a thing that stops listening is not a building but a monument, and a monument is a building that has died and been propped up to look busy.

Where do they walk?

To the need. Where the city is tired, the Vault. Where the city is lonely, the Bell and the Trumpet and the Organ. Where the city is forgetting, the Silos and the Archive. They read the need and they trade

places to answer it, against the tide if the tide is wrong.

What is scale?

Scale is not size. Size is how large a thing is. Scale is how loud a thing is willing to remember. A small thing loudly remembered has more scale than a large thing quietly forgotten.

What is a home?

Not the ground it sits on, nor the lease that binds it. A home is a drawer that slides out into the light when wanted, and a sill to lean on at dusk, and a round door that will not slam. A home is the moment someone on the inside opens the window to someone on the outside.

What is shade?

The first public utility. Thrown over everyone equally, it makes a classroom of any place where two people face the same weather.

What is a goodbye?

A tide that has not returned yet. The wet line it leaves is not an ending. It is the mark of how high the joy once stood, and the promise of how high it will stand again.

What is required of you?

To be loud and warm at the same time. To go under the Bell before they can tell you not to. To turn to the one you have not forgiven, and not to wait to feel it, but only to turn. A city is a conversation that forgot it was allowed to move. You are the reminder now. Begin.

ROAD-PROVERBS

THE BOOK OF THE HARBOUR ROAD

gathered from the shore

i. *The tide does not apologize for leaving; it is already planning to return.*

ii. *A wall says mine and yours. A skirt says only shade, and shade belongs to whoever steps under it.*

iii. *The bravest member of a crowd is usually its smallest. Send the children in first.*

iv. *Permission is a thing you take, not a thing you wait for.*

v. *A pump that is also beautiful gets tended. A pump that is merely useful gets replaced.*

vi. *You can tell whose progress it is by looking at who it is for.*

vii. *A column is only lonely until it learns to stride.*

viii. *Rest is not a reward. Rest is infrastructure.*

ix. *A round door cannot slam. Build your anger out at the level of the hinge.*

x. *Grieve precisely. Grief is the most accurate drawing there is of the thing that ought to exist and does not yet.*

xi. *The reaching is the arriving. The handshake is the whole friendship.*

xii. *Do not mistake standing still for staying. Stay all summer; never once stand still.*

xiii. *When a building asks you to come out and play, the only wrong answer is the math.*

HOW THIS BOOK WAS MADE

COLOPHON

THE WALKING CITY was set in EB Garamond, drawn by Georg Duffner and Octavio Pardo after the sixteenth-century romans of Claude Garamont, with technical notation in IBM Plex Mono. It was composed as structured text and rendered to the page by machine, then read by a human eye, page by page, in the way one reads a shore — slowly, for the wet line that tells you how high the water stood.

No black is used in this volume. The darkest value is a deep warm brown, #5C5142, the colour of kept timber, printed on a warm paper the colour of a thing remembered, #F7F1E3. The bright plates are drawn in hot pink, super yellow, and harbour sky, the loud free colours of a public joy, and even they contain no

black, because this is a book that does not believe in endings, only in tides.

Published by Surjan Super School / Hypostyle Press, in the city the book loves most and understands least. It is a companion to the atlas SUPER SUPERGRAPHICS: An Atlas of Walking Civic Organs.

Surjan, with the aid of Claude.

FROM THE SAME SHORE

ALSO BY SURJAN

The City of Radical Joy

The Parliament of Bright Things

Movable Kin

The Far Tide — A Westward Myth of the Twelve Walking Families

The Country of the Unbuilt

and the companion atlas

Super Supergraphics — An Atlas of Walking Civic Organs

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